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C H U M S.

C H U M S :

A Tale of the Queen's Baby.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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CHUMS:

A TALE OF THE QUEEN'S NAVY.

CHAPTER I.

WHO does not know Gibraltar? Dear old Gib! Who does not know the key to the Mediterranean? Who has not rounded Tarifa Point, and been gladdened with a sight of the brave old rock, the ancient Calpe, which, with Abyla on the African shore, formed the “Pillars of Hercules?” the grand old rock, which has resisted all the efforts of France and Spain to regain possession of it, since our gallant countrymen, assisted by the Dutch, took it by surprise in 1704.

Who does not know the Bay into which the British Fleet sailed, the *Neptune* towing the *Victory*, the latter still flying Nelson's

flag, but at half-mast, and dropped anchor after the battle of Trafalgar? sailed, with colours half-mast high, and with drooping hearts on every deck, for the leading spirit had gone aloft, the “leading hand” had struck his last, for “England, Home, and Beauty;” and though his body, pierced by a bullet from the *Redoutable*, was even then under hatches, still in his old ship, leading—as it ever had—his gallant fleet, the soul of the sailor hero, the glorious Nelson, had answered the pipe of “all hands.”

Who does not know the toil of clambering up to the signal station, which stands 1,300 and something feet above the sea? and who has not felt the keenest sense of enjoyment as he reaps, or, rather, *drinks*, his reward in the shape of a pint pewter of draught ale, fresh, clear, and bright as the surrounding atmosphere? The thought of that foaming beaker almost persuadeth me to become poetical, and certainly conduceth unto thirst.

But to proceed. A good many people know nothing of these things, and, what is more, prefer knowing nothing.

The high-minded, patriotic Englishman, whose one idea is “Money, How to Make It,” who will tell you that it is shameful to us, as a nation, that we remain there, a perpetual eyesore to the noble Spaniard, and who will advocate its immediate restoration for a pecuniary consideration ; he, I say, this lofty-souled, generous, money-grubbing humbug, cares nothing for our key, except inasmuch as there may be a chance of turning it into a golden one.

The Governor of Algesiras—a small Spanish town on the opposite shore of the bay—still has attached to his commission “Governor of Algesiras and Gibraltar, *now in temporary possession of the English.*” The italics are mine. What a subtle joker the noble Spaniard must be.

The rollicking teetotaller, the festive good templar, imbibers of ginger ale and

raspberry vinegar, what do they know of the good draught ale? *Nothing*, poor devils, although it is possible that they may have known too much, which would account for the milk in the cocoanut, or the raspberry in the vinegar.

The pretty schoolgirl, fond of novels, fond of dancing; above all, fond of admiration, and whose greatest trial at present is the absolute necessity of keeping her hair-pins stuck in and her hair straight. Watch her as she and her twenty young lady companions sit in their pews in church, anxiously awaiting the moment, and *more* anxiously striving to appear unconscious when the moment arrives, for the entrance of the twenty young gentlemen who are enjoying all the comforts of a good home, rural sports, and an exceptionally good education, exactly opposite the detached villa in which the aforementioned young ladies are receiving a “finish,” and being initiated into all the mysteries of grace, elegance,

and deportment. What does she know of either the brave old rock or the good draught ale? *Nothing*, sweet angel! neither does she care.

The old woman just able to read her big Bible, and darn “her old man’s socks.” The old man able to do neither, and only awaiting the time when he can fill his pipe and raise his glass no longer. What do they care for the brave old rock? *Nothing*, poor old fossils!

And what do you care, gentle reader, neither poor devil nor old fossil, what do you care? Not much, I fancy, so we will smother our feelings, and just mentioning that Gibraltar is Scene I., we ring the second bell and draw up the curtain.

Away, then, away from the Signal Station and beer, away from Church Street and the reading-room, Sacconi and the ice shop, and Camisuli’s, the Moorish curiosity shop, where pretty Carmen disposes of fans, Moorish slippers and trays, at *great loss*—perhaps

of a kiss—to a good customer; and what matters it if she shrugs her pretty bare shoulders in contempt at “Ze Inglaise” directly your back is turned?

Away from the wily Rock Scorpion (native of Gibraltar) to that fertile spot, “the neutral ground,” which lies between the English and Spanish “lines,” and where sand, stubble, and straw, take the place of mother earth and grass.

Here’s a go-car, jump in with me! Drive through the gates and get out at the cricket ground, which is situated in the sandy region of English and Spanish neutrality.

Here we have it—a burning sun! no shade! and a party of British officers, naval and military, hard at a match; for is not the Channel Fleet at anchor in the Bay, and must not John Bull’s national game be played everywhere?

“I’m blowed if we shan’t win yet,” said the smallest member of a group of three, two of whom were enjoying cigarettes and

a “split peg.” The third member, the speaker, was a boy of about sixteen, with a remarkably shrill voice, and a face, every feature of which at present denoted unlimited cheek. He rejoiced in the nickname of “The Nipper,” but was born an Ormby and christened Richard.

“There seems every probability of your experiencing the sensation of being blowed, then,” grumbled Cecil Monkton, “though how the operation is to be performed, and with what result to your small carcass, I fail to comprehend; there’s only ten minutes left before we ‘draw,’ and as our fellows don’t seem likely to make thirty runs in that time, the match will be decided by the first innings, and the soldiers will win.”

“Blow the soldiers,” returned Mr. Midshipman Ormby, “though how the operation is to be performed, and with what result to their *bloated* carcases, I fail to comprehend.”

“If I get up, my young friend, I’ll have your blood, and teach you not to chaff your senior officer,” said Cecil, lazily throwing his legs over the long arms of his American cane chair.

“You look awfully like getting up, don’t you, you long-legged—— Oh! I say, sir, I’m awfully sorry,” he broke off, as Cecil slung a pad at him, which he dodged, and allowed to proceed straight into the face of the third member of the group, who, except when he occasionally took a pull at his B. and S., had been absorbed in meditation. The pad, however, effectually aroused him. He shook himself, and said plaintively—

“It ’th very annoying. I wath just arranging a little poem to thend that little Carmen at the curiothity shop. It runth like thith—

Farewell, thweet maid, where’er I roam,
I’ll often think of you:
On land, at thea, abroad, at home,
When there’th nothing else to do.

When me no other thoughts engroth,
 Oh, pray remember thith,
I feel, I do, I'll take my oath,
 That last thweet thmacking ——”

“Thlap in the face,” broke in the irrepressible youngster, but not with quite his usual amount of shrillness, for the Honourable Francis Daintree was flag-lieutenant to Admiral Sir Robert Swifter, and Dicky did not know him well enough to feel safe in giving such open chaff as fell to the lot of his lazy friend, Lieutenant Cecil Monkton.

“By Jove, there goes the Slug’s wicket,” continued Dicky. “Five minutes more and 17 more runs to make. Well, Slug!” as a heavy looking midshipman walked disconsolately in, “if you weren’t such a long, ungainly, uncouth monster, I’d kick you! Why did you run away from the ball? What were you afraid of? Eh?”

“Now, look here, Ormby,” the disconsolate “Slug” made answer, “I don’t feel inclined for chaff, and what’s more I won’t

have it. I'd like to see you trying to kick me!"

"Tho' should I!" lisped the flag lieutenant; "give him a sheet of paper, and let's see how high he can reach!"

"Hurrah! I've drawn the Slug! He's got his shirt out!" screamed Dicky.

"Now, Nipper; order! no gun-room slang! no unladylike language. You'll force me to get up," came slowly from the depths of the long arm chair.

"I fancy not, Cecil! My strength's limited, and a patent hydraulic lift would have its work cut out before your white flannels and the chair's cane separated. In fact I think," he continued, gravely, "that if you move at all it will be in a downward direction, and you will meet with the fate of the old woman mentioned in that ancient poem 'The three Bears,' who sat on the wee little bear's chair with the following dreadful result:

The bottom of the chair came out
And she came on the floor.

“Pay attention to the match, young'un,” said Monkton, “or you will get another pad at your head.”

“I don't think Mr. Daintree would quite like that. He still feels that last, ‘thweet thmacking kith.’”

A ringing cheer and cries of “Well hit, Spencer! Run it out!” proclaims that the match is not over, the navy not beaten yet; and the ball comes bounding towards the luncheon tent, bowling over little Ormby—who, knife in hand, was stealthily executing a flank movement on the unconscious “Slug”—and then cannoning off into the lap of the luckless Daintree.

“You young beggar, you're always in the way,” growled out several irate naval men, as the unabashed “Nipper” struggled to his feet.

“So am I, it seemth,” said poor Daintree. “I wath just thinking of that cruel poem I received from that little girl at the tobacconist's in Plymouth, before we

started last time. It runth like thith,
Monkton:

Go, Francis go,
Too well I know
You are a gay deceiver.
You say you're too
Most awf'ly spoo-
Ney on a girl;—then, leave her!
But since at sea,
So soon you'll be;
To cheer your lonely evenings
I may remark
That, after dark,
I 'comp'ny keep' with Stevings!

“Stevings—his proper name was Stevens, but the little puss wasn't much at grammar—was the butcher next door, and was a loathsome object.” Having said which, Daintree gave a melancholy smile, and ordered another *split* for Monkton and himself.

Two minutes more, and six runs to get ! Spencer is out ! caught very cleverly by Newton, a Sapper. Captain Le Hunte, R.N., of the *Thunderbomb*, and the Colonel of the 150th, stroll up to the scoring tent.

“Well, my boy, which is to be the

winner, 'Fleet or Garrison ? ' " said Le Hunte, stopping before the Nipper.

"Don't know at all, sir. Ah ! There we are, time's up. Four runs to get and two more wickets to go down, and yet it has to be decided by the first innings, and they win."

"Never mind, youngster, better luck next time," laughed the captain. "I'm afraid, Colonel, we naval men don't shine at cricket. Don't get sufficient practice. How can a man keep up his batting off the West Coast of Africa, in the Persian Gulf, or in a Flying Squadron which is only in harbour for a few days at a time, and if he gets a game at all it's generally a big match with no chance of getting into good form beforehand ! You dine with the Admiral to-night, do you not ; so we shall meet again." And the skipper of the *Thunderbomb* walked over to Daintree, with whom he had agreed to drive to the Ragged Staff landing place.

In came the victorious team ; hot and dusty, for the naval men have given them a deal of leather hunting this last innings.

“Are you ready to make a move, Monkton ?” asked Hawthorne, of the 150th, “you dine with me to-night, you know. Won’t you come too, Daintree ? and we’ll get up a pool afterwards ?”

“Many thanks, but it’s impossible. The ’Ral has a big dinner on, and the Captain and myself are just going off in his galley.”

“All right. Good-bye, old fellow.”

“I say, Cecil,” said the Nipper, as Monkton and Hawthorne were getting into their trap, “just one word before I tear myself away ! Let me whisper ! I’ve *been* blowed, but how the operation was performed or with what—”

“Drive on, Johnnie ! I’ll be the death of *you*, *you young villain* !” roared Cecil.

CHAPTER II.

UR way now lies with Monkton and Hawthorne, who, still discussing the leading features of the day's match, are puffing smoke and making a start across the neutral ground once more, on their way home.

The military law of "Gib" is, rightly enough, very strict. At sunset the gates are closed; and woe to the unfortunate who has been too careless of the flight of the enemy, for, be he anxious to get out amongst the Spaniards, or be he anxious to get in amongst the English, equally will he be sold, and will remain on, so to speak, the wrong side of the hedge until next morning.

However, we will not be amongst the goats to-night! The garlicy proprietor of

the greasy hotel at the Spanish lines shall not score a single *centimo* by *our* misfortunes; neither will we herd with any of the ghastly groups of men, women, and children, who, regardless of decency, half-clothed and wholly vile, will huddle together for hours on the neutral ground.

None of these luxuries for us! We give them up voluntarily! We will return to our own simple, unassuming habitations!

It is getting near sunset now, and the out-goers and in-comers can make their way but slowly.

We have lots of time to observe them, as our trap comes to a stand-still fifty yards from the great gates.

Few, if any places, can show such a variety of face, form, and limb. Port Said, since the Canal started, harbours an even larger sprinkling of different nationalities, certainly a larger assortment of the *scum* of different nations, but then they are not all strained into a narrow tube at a certain

time every day, giving one such a panorama as this.

Here they come !

A pair of mules, with glittering harness and jangling bells, drawing a phaeton, inside which, leaning well back with her duenna, is a laughing, black-eyed señorita, with coquettish veil and head-dress, who has been enjoying a day's shopping in Gibraltar.

Close behind, taking advantage of the necessary slowness with which everything and everybody moves, to cast furtive glances of admiration at the smiling damsel, comes a Spanish priest, who has been visiting Brother Ambrose, of the Gibraltar Roman Catholic Cathedral. She is used to his admiration ; do they not meet in the confessional ? and prefers, at present, to look in the direction of our two companions. Lucky dogs ! Now a bright-eyed Abigail—"own maid" to the wife of one of the officers of the garrison—who has

taken advantage of being sent out to match a ribbon, to steal outside for a short chat with Tommy Atkins of the 150th, comes tripping in, “cheek-by-jowl” with a long, gaunt Arab, who, wrapped in his filthy blanket, stalks along, apparently unconscious of the close proximity of youth and beauty.

“Make way, there! room for a lady!” and, trotting leisurely along, pushing his way through everything, comes a sagacious jackass, with paniers half-full of eggs, and a wrinkled female perched astride his hinder quarters. A fat, frowsy old haybag she looks; and at least equally frowsy is the peasant who runs by her side, bridle in hand, being dragged by, rather than guiding, the faithful moke.

“More room, there! more ladies!” and, laughing and flirting, a riding party of soldiers, their wives, daughters, and friends, endeavour to push along.

Dogs of breeds; carts of sorts, filled with

wool and fodder; Moors, in gorgeous turbans, brilliant jackets, knickerbockers, and heelless slippers, all combine to swell this most amusing of living streams. At last we are able to move on again, driving past bastion after bastion, past the market-place, and so into the main street, past the Cathedral, Government House, and the Main Guard, over the bridge, and so along the road by the *Alaméda*, passing above the Ragged Staff, the Dockyard, and the bathing place at Rosix Bay, on to the barracks of the 150th Fusiliers.

“There goes the ‘dressing bugle,’ ” said Hawthorne, as the car stopped at the officers’ quarters; “we’ve hit it off nicely; just in time for a sherry and bitters before we dress.”

Few of the 150th are concerned in the tale, so we will not linger over the mess-table.

It was about 9 P.M. when a “move” began to be made.

“Who’s for the theatre? Who’s for pool?”

“What do you say, Cecil?” said Hawthorne.

“Well, it’s so infernally sultry that I think even the third-rate music in that open-air theatre would be preferable to pool to-night; but I’m game for anything you like.”

“Right! we’ll make up a party for the theatre, and all drive down together. By-the-bye, it doesn’t begin until 9.30, and it’s no good getting there too early, so I’ll play you a fifty game of billiards before we start.”

At a little before ten, the party set out for the *Alaméda*.

“Heard anything more of your little actress and protégé, Cecil?”

“Oh, yes! I forget whether I told you fellows the whole story. There will be just time before we reach the theatre. I had little Dicky Ormby under my wing

the other night, and we had been carefully reading the English papers in the reading room.

“The young beggar had tumbled off to sleep, and I fancy I must have been thinking very deeply. At any rate, it was past eleven when we cleared out. We were commencing to cross the square, when I thought I saw something move on the steps underneath the smoking room. We walked towards them, and, sure enough, there was something, small and white, which clutched me by the trowsers, and, looking down, I discovered a pale, half-starved child, sobbing pitifully.

“Dicky and I looked at one another in consternation; we couldn’t let the poor little devil remain there, and neither of us had much experience in the management of kids.

“I sat on the steps, took the child on my knee, and with the assistance of

Dicky—who's one idea seemed to be making faces—tried to quiet her. When she found tongue—she couldn't have been much more than three years old—she sobbed out the lesson that some worthless woman had taught her before turning her adrift. ‘I’se a lub child an’ she’s sick of me.’ ‘Who’s sick of you, little chap?’ said the Nipper, pausing on the stroke of a most masterly grimace. ‘*She’s* sick of me,’ and the sobbing came on again, *more* piteously.

“Once more the Nipper and I looked at each other, and with still more consternation, and I’m hanged if I don’t believe that we should have remained on those steps, looking at one another with ever-increasing consternation until this moment, had not a girl, who was passing swiftly down the street, stopped in evident astonishment at our group. Thought we were bullying the child, I daresay! Here was a chance not to be missed, and

having had, from earliest infancy, the utmost confidence in the opposite sex in anything concerning *babies*, I beckoned that astonished girl, and carefully deposited our little friend in her arms without a word.

“Rum little beggars, kids! She quieted down almost immediately, and clung to her rescuer, and, as I trusted, *our* preserver.

“Then came the old formula. With how many blows and shakings had she been taught it! ‘I’se a lub child an’ she’s sick of me.’ The girl—number two, the preserver, you know—looked at me, evidently expecting some explanation, and I tclt her all I had heard, which amounted to deuced little.

“By this time the child had fallen asleep, and looked so pale and ghastly by the dim lamp-light, that, but for an occasional sob, one might have thought her dead.

“I’m not what you call a goody, goody sort of fellow ; my morals, I’m afraid, are loose ; my general tone of mind, dissipated, but here was a new experience, thrust as it were into one’s very arms, and plain enough to understand. Seduction, desertion, cruelty. Ah, you fellows, it was a side of the picture that *we* seldom see, and looking at it, I cursed the villain who seduced, and the mother who had deserted,—no, not the mother, thank God there had been no mockery of that word. I should say the ‘*she*’ of the child’s piteous cry.” Here Cecil broke off abruptly, and gave rather a poor attempt at a laugh.

“Take time, old boy,” said one of the soldiers.

“I beg pardon, I’m afraid,” and Cecil went back to his ordinary, rather lazy style, “I’m afraid I began to drivel ; can’t make out why I started cheap sentiment ; we’ll put it down to that

curaçoa and brandy ; it's scarcely my usual line ! ”

It speaks well for the sex to which the “villains” belong, that, notwithstanding Monkton’s “driveling” and “cheap sentimentiality,” not a man of that after dinner party had sneered at the story, not a man but was, for the time at any rate, interested in the “poor little devil on the doorstep.”

“Never mind your usual line ; finish the yarn,” said Hawthorne.

“Well, there’s not much more to tell. I persuaded our—how shall we distinguish her?—our *life-preserver*, to take the child home with her ; not that she wanted much persuasion, and after seeing her housed, Dicky and I shipped ourselves on board the old *Thunder-bomb* again.

“I might mention that our life-preserver is between seventeen and eighteen years of age, her name is Mary Lawrence, and

she performs at the theatre to-night. Here we are, tumble out!"

Cecil probably forgot to add that he had paid down a lump sum for the child's outfit, and had made every arrangement to prevent her becoming a burden in her new home.

The theatre was a temporary affair, unroofed; erected at one end of the *Alaméda*; and the whole of the arrangements were in rather primitive style; but it was cool; you could see the stars, and, greatest blessing, most soothing influence of all, you could smoke. Naval and military officers, principally in mess dress, occupied the stalls, in which were also a good number of Rock Scorpions, male and female. The English ladies thought the business savoured too much of the Music Hall, to patronize it.

"*La Grande Duchesse*" was being performed, "*Fritz*" being ogled by the *Duchesse* as they entered.

Hawthorne and Monkton found seats in one of the front rows, and *one*, at any rate, of them was anxious to see the actress, Mary Lawrence, come on the stage.

They had not long to wait ; she soon appeared as Fritz's sweetheart, in the scene in which he is “on sentry,” and will take no notice of her, “according to regulation.”

Although by no means *great*, either as a singer or an actress, her pretty, innocent face and manner went down uncommonly well with the susceptible British officer. The way in which she alternately coaxed and bullied the unfortunate sentry, until giving up his pretended zeal for his duty, he flings his musket on the ground and himself into her arms, to the tune and words of “*Damn* the regulation ;” fairly brought down the house—or would have, had it been roofed.

“Dev’lish pretty little girl that !” remarked a man behind Monkton ; “looks

simple, too, and—confiding ! We must see more of her, mustn't we, Jack ? ”

“ Not much difficulty about that, I should imagine ! She's probably about as simple as your little friend Vic, and equally unmercenary,” replied Jack.

“ Ah ! poor little Vic, she certainly has a strong taste for filigree ornaments,” said the first speaker.

“ Yes; and it's not hard to guess the amount of simplicity left in a strolling actress like Mary Lawrence,” resumed Jack. “ I'll bet you I discover the exact amount in under a week, if you like.”

Both the men laughed, and Cecil felt so disgusted at the way in which they spoke of a girl whom he knew to be pure and simple, that, saying good night to Hawthorne, he got up and left the theatre.

Many other women; pure wives, spotless daughters, did Mr. Jack Armstrong drag through the mire during the course

of the evening. With any amount of money; owner of a yacht (in which he had lately come to Gib), horses, everything that coin could purchase; with no near relatives, and no profession, Mr. John, or Jack Armstrong did, as so many idlers of his description do; sneered at goodness, laughed at virtue, and, caring for no one, was, in return, uncared for by the very man who cruised in his yacht, rode his horses, and called him “Jack,” and “Old fellow.”

Leaving our characters behind us, as Sir Peter Trayle does at Lady Sneerwell’s, for the benefit of the back-biters, we will follow Monkton out into the open.

Lighting a cigar, he throws himself under a tree, and waits—as, truth to tell, he has waited several times lately—for Mary.

It is past midnight before she appears, tripping along, fast as usual. He has risen, and is just going to call to her to

wait for him, when another figure passes quickly by him, another and very different voice to his accosts the girl ; a mocking voice, which makes her tremble and hurry along quicker then ever.

“A fine night, is it not, my dear ? What a charming little sweetheart you made ; what a shame of ‘Fritz’ not to see you home. But I may instead, may I not, pretty one ?”

Mary hurried on, afraid to even *look* at her tormentor, who kept close at her side, smiling down into her pale face.

“Don’t walk so fast, dear, you will leave me behind without having had a single kiss. It’s nice and dark under the trees, you *will* let me, won’t you ? Fritz shan’t be angry ; that’s right ; just one little one.”

His hand is on her arm, but before it can encircle her waist, a blow, in which is contained all the viciousness that Cecil has kept bottled up since leaving the

theatre, catches him full on the cheek, and over he rolls, half senseless.

“Thought so!” said Cecil, as he turned him over and recognised the now disfigured face of the man who had so annoyed him.

“Glad I hit out straight; come, take my arm, Miss Lawrence, and we will jog along together!” and poor Mary, looking thoroughly miserable and trying hard to keep the tears back, is only too glad to do so; leaving her tormentor—who she is still afraid to look at—to pick himself up as soon as he thinks proper.

“Oh! why!” she said, her low musical voice sounding very sad to Cecil, “why are some men so cruel, so heartless? and there are so many! so many of them.”

Poor Mary, young as she was, she had on several occasions before this needed protection, and had long ago discovered that her youth could give her none.

What could *he* say? A naval officer, a combatant one I mean—learns the world's lessons shortly after he enters his 'teens, and Cecil had, of course, seen plenty of this sort of cruelty.

"If, like me," she continued, "they had no mother, no sister, I think, perhaps, I could understand it better; but how they can go straight from a mother's kiss, a sister's petting, to such a—a—" she stopped! How could she, a young girl, tell him all she thought, all she fancied?

"Never mind; forget all about it," he said. "Besides, *you* have a sister, you know, now. I suppose Maggie will be fast asleep by this time?"

"I don't know; she is just as likely to be wide awake. But you will come in and see her and—father."

The Lawrences were lodging in a small street at the back of the cathedral; the head of the family was of a peculiarly retiring disposition. Born a gentleman,

and once holding a good position—he had sunk, through drunkenness and other vices, lower and lower on the social ladder, until he had reached the rung on which we shall be introduced to him: some years ago he had lost his right leg in a railway accident, and had taken to drink harder than ever.

Mary's salary is small, for she was very young to be engaged for leading parts, and the manager had made rather a favour of taking her.

Poor girl! her's has been a hard life. As far back as she can recollect she has been the slave of a drunken and violent father, who has never ceased to impress upon her that her mission (alas for woman's mission) is to soothe his declining years, providing money honestly or otherwise.

Living in London, he had managed to have her fairly educated; she had a great liking for music, and a good

voice, and he soon determined that no time should be lost in turning both to account. After a few engagements in minor parts, in small provincial theatres, she had, about six weeks ago, joined the company we have seen, on the eve of their starting for Gib.

They reached the lodgings, and Mary opened the door with her latch-key.

“What the devil d’you make s’much noise for?” growled a hoarse thick voice from a room at the end of the narrow passage.

“It’s me, father. Mr. Monkton has come in for a few minutes to see you and Maggie.”

“Well, he can come in without making row enough to wake the dead.”

This came rather less harshly along the passage, for Mr. Jim Lawrence did not care to bully his daughter before Monkton, who seemed likely to turn out a useful friend.

They groped their way through the tobacco smoke and fumes of gin, and entered the small back room together.

Mr. Lawrence was sitting at the table in his shirt-sleeves, a half-emptied bottle at his side, a short black pipe in his mouth.

I wouldn't dare to introduce a low villain to my gentle readers without gin and short black pipe.

He muttered a surly greeting as Cecil entered, but did not attempt to rise. He is a man of moderate height, thick set, with a face which must once have been handsome, and which even now shows few signs of dissipation and crime.

“So you've brought the girl safely home! Hope you enjoyed your walk!” And he leered at them both.

“I am tired, father, and shall go to bed. If you would like to see Maggie, Mr. Monkton, will you take a peep at her now?”

“Thank you, I should like to,” said Cecil.

Mary said good-night to her father, and Cecil followed her upstairs to the child’s cot.

“Dood Mr. Monk, I knew ‘ou was toming,” cried the little one, springing up, and throwing her arms around him directly he went near her. “Dey said he’d tome,” she continued, delightedly, to Mary, “and I was so gad, I wote up at once.” The little darling looked as happy as possible, but so sleepy.

“I must not keep you awake now, Maggie, it’s very late. I’ll come and see you again before the ship sails.”

“ ‘Ou mustn’t go far, or I’ll send zat bad black man, who tomes to me wen I’m tross, to bring ‘ou back adain.”

“All right, little woman, that will be a first-rate way to get rid of your bad black friend, won’t it? But I hope he doesn’t come often!”

“He tomes *too* often, mammy says,” and the child nodded her head sagely. “Oftentimes he bins his bid, black dog, and puts it on my souldeer.”

“Oh, I’m sure he doesn’t do that very often. Good-night, little woman, mammy is sleepy if you are not.” He kissed her and laid her back in the cot, as she said,

“Mamma’s sleepy, but Maggie’s not a wee bit,” and before “mammy” could give her a kiss she was fast asleep.

Let me describe the pair as they stand together by the child’s cot.

She is slightly above the average height, rather fair and delicate-looking, with an earnest, trustful expression. Her face is *sweet*, the best kind of prettiness, and she is altogether a girl to be loved dearly, to be protected carefully.

He is a tall, powerfully-made man, with curling, chesnut hair, blue eyes, and a ruddy complexion; a strong, hand-

some face, able to make its own way in the world, but with too great a love of ease and pleasure depicted upon it.

There! I hope you are satisfied ; I hate describing people !

The pair—the “ tall, powerfully-made, &c., &c.,” man, and the “ fair, delicate-looking, &c., &c.,” woman, bade each other good night, and the former returned to the sitting-room, the smoke, and the gin.

Lawrence was still sitting over his grog, and had evidently been imbibing pretty freely whilst the others were upstairs. He greeted Monkton with a cunning grin, and in a familiar tone, which was infinitely more objectionable than his usual bullying one, said—

“ Well ! musht shay, dev’lish good of shwell like you to come ’n shee brok’n-down cad like m’shelf. Tak’ a chair, Cap’n ; help’n shelf—I’m ole sailor m’shelf—not Royal Navy, tho’—musht’a been

shinsh I—turn'd cad :—musht'a been in merch'n sewish. Don't seem t'raelec much 'bout it shomehow.—By-th'-bye," and he pulled himself together, "p'raps you'll tell me what you *do* want? 'tween frien's —you don't come t' see *me*; that's hardly good 'nough—p'raps it'sh the girl! Ah! young blood! young be-lood! I don't mind telling you, 'tween friends, that I shan't stand i' your way." Cecil stared at him in the greatest astonishment, and, after a long pull at his glass, he continued, dropping back once more into thick utterance, "What meant shay's thish—she's yoursh!—for conshid'ration. Th' old gov'nor won't shpoil shport! Nev' mind weddings!—mat'mon'y—bosh! Tak'er! Blesh ye m' chil'en." And the old villain's head fell forward on the table.

"Good God! Are such things possible! And you are her father?" exclaimed Cecil, rising, and speaking in tones of the deepest disgust.

“ Who’sh ‘er father ? ”

“ Why, you are, are you not ? ”

“ Nev’ mind !—Cap’n’s ’quish’tive ! Blesh you !—Nev’ mind mat’mony !—slight schrip-tion for poor old Gov’nor to ‘keep’n quiet ! Tak’er ; Blesh ye m’ chil’n ! ”

Utterly disgusted, Cecil left the room and the house.



CHAPTER III.

BUT now, gentle reader, come into my confidence. I'm sick of Gib!

After only two chapters I want change of scene. My poetic outburst was a sham ; my wild enthusiasm about the brave old rock was an imposture ! I feel it now, and marvel how I worked it up ; more especially do I marvel when I remember that for fully six months I had not opened a "Life of Nelson," and for at least the same period of time had eschewed both beer for breakfast and gin cocktails afterwards.

But I can conceal it no longer—Gib is a feeble spot ; not as one of "Our Military Stations," but as a "Tea Garden and Recreation ground !" It is weak—very ! Be-

sides, there are other characters to be introduced; the “sisters, cousins and aunts” of the friends and enemies we have made already, and they, intelligent creatures, do *not* live on the brave old rock—far from it. So, although we shall not arrive there for a chapter or two, I may mention between ourselves that we are off to England.

But first, come and take one more peep, by daylight this time, into the Lawrences’ sitting room.

It is small and scantily furnished. The regulation allowance of lodging-house ornaments on the mantel-piece, the regulation allowance of lodging-house chairs, with covers on, &c., &c. The proprietor of the lodgings is half English, and prides himself upon having the correct taste in such matters. “The infant Samuel” is there in plaster. The man, who—attired in an ivy leaf—leans against a post, crosses his legs, and plays the banjo, is there, in wood. The woman, who—attired in a laurel wreath—

leans against a post, crosses her legs, and appears to be momentarily expecting half-a-brick to be thrown at her head, is also there in wood. The necessary china fruits underneath their glass cases are upon the sideboard, whilst on the little round table before the window is the piece of pink and white coral. Mr. Lawrence is out, thank goodness. The *Café Royale* being just around the corner, we may safely conclude that the head of all the Lawrences is not far distant ; he has avoided Monkton since their last interview.

Mary is working ; Maggie is playing with a doll which is arrayed in a style of magnificence unequalled since the days of “Solomon in all his glory.” “The infant Samuel,” with his eyes shut and no “knee-caps,”—poor boy!—is praying, and striving to look comfortable ; the man against the post continues to play the banjo ; the woman, in like position, continues resolutely prepared to ward off the threat-

ened brick, and Cecil Monkton, the inevitable cigar between his lips, looks perfectly lazy and contented, in an arm chair, as we enter.

“Now, Mr. Monk, 'ou and mammy's tome to tate tea wid little Tommy Tutter; I'm Tommy's mammy.”

Master Thomas Tucker was the doll in the gorgeous attire.

“I'm not particularly spooney on tea,” laughed Cecil, good humouredly, “but as you are so pressing—”

“Oh, it's only betend, 'ou know. Do 'ou take sudar, sir?” and Maggie busied herself amongst her small cups and saucers. “I donnō which one's most grown up, to give tea to first,” she continued.

“Ah, you must guess that. Which should you think?”

“I think zat 'ou is ze *eldest* an' mammy is ze *oldest*.”

“Well, that's a good example of a distinction without a difference, young woman,”

said Cecil. "No more, I thank you, ma'am," he continued, as Maggie, having poured some terrible concoction into a cup, tried hard to persuade him to drink it.

"Mary, time's up!" said he, rising quickly, after a glance at his watch. "I must say good-bye; Dare will be expecting me on board to relieve him. I may write, may I not? and you will let me know, now and then, how you are all getting on. The moment you return to England I shall find you out, and hear what you intend doing. Good-bye! mind you both take care of yourselves."

Who can act like a young girl who knows the world? Who can tell what were Mary's feelings as she said good-bye to the only real friend and protector she had known? After he had left, with a smile and shake of the hand for her, and a kiss for the weeping Maggie; after the curtain had fallen and the stage been cleared, then came the real "life behind

the scenes," and unmindful of Maggie, forgetting everything but the bitterness of that smiling good-bye, Mary threw herself upon the old horse-hair sofa and sobbed aloud.

"It was not love, he never loved me! and I—I—"

The little one, half frightened, crept up to her, and was immediately taken into her arms ; and so they wept on together. The young girl, as *women must* weep who feel that their love, their yearning, craving to *be* loved is all unthought of, uncared for : the little one, as *children will* weep whose mamma's have forgotten to send and have them brought down to dessert. Oh, ye tears ! useless ! useless !

A few days ago I saw a telescope—now in the possession of an English naval officer—which was made expressly for the use of the Great Napoleon, whilst he was a prisoner at St. Helena. It was a very long and powerful instrument.

Can you not imagine the yearning for freedom, the craving for a return to *life*, which he must have felt as he gazed through it at vessels sailing past his small house, Longwood, and knew that although he could bring them seemingly close, they were in reality far away from him, and all that remained of his greatness. And so Mary yearned for Cecil's love.

He had been near her for weeks ; common interests had seemed to bring them close, and yet she felt now that he had, in reality, been far away from *her* and *her life*, and would sail away knowing nothing of her thoughts and cravings.

Cecil, sorry at having to leave them, but having before him the certainty of being "homeward bound" to-morrow, walked rapidly towards the main street, intending to have a sherry and bitters, and see if any "Thunderbombs" were going off to the ship. Thinking, probably, more of the "loved ones at home" than of the "rock

scorpions" around him; he was far away in a four-handed game of lawn tennis, and had just arrived at forty all.

"*Deuce!* and I serve right!" he said, in something above a whisper, as a particularly energetic "damn it!" proclaimed that he had run into somebody. He murmured something about being sorry, and he felt rather ashamed of himself. He was unused to running into things. Naval officers at that time were dreadfully inexperienced. Remember, it was some few years ago. No one would accuse an officer of the present day of inexperience in that line. There we certainly have improved.

"You haven't done anything to be so proud of! *Serve me right*, indeed! If I wasn't lame—I'd—hulloh, captain, it's you, is it? No offence, but it seems a little hard to knock down a one-legged man, and then say it serves him right. I have been transacting a little business, and am just returning to my apartments, and—ah

—dear daughter. Good-bye!” With an attempt at dignity which contrasted ludicrously with his billiard-markery “get up,” Mr. Lawrence re-cocked his hat, and turned to limp away.

“We part friends, Mr. Lawrence?”

“That’s as may be, Lieutenant Monkton, sir. You left me most abruptly the other night, but—I—ah—bear no malice. I—ah—let it pass. An old man, a—ah—cripple, must make allowance for youth and vigour.”

“You do not dare to refer to your villainous proposition again! Stupid with drink, degraded to the level of a brute as you were, I forgave it then, but do not try me more. I would forgive much for Mary’s sake. Good-bye, Mr. Lawrence.” The old man took his proffered hand and pressed it fervently.

“Good-bye, captain, we part friends.” And with one look back at his friend, a look which, had he seen it, would have

brought Cecil's humming to an abrupt conclusion, the worthy father made for his lodgings.

“Degraded! stupid with drink! ah, we shall run against one another again yet, and as friends! ah, yes! as *such* friends.” On he limps, chuckling occasionally, and muttering “such friends!”

Cecil, with thoughts much nearer now, thoughts of Mary and her wretched father, walked on towards the club.

He found a large gathering of fellows there, most of whom were discussing the probability of getting a good look at the fleet going out of harbour on the following morning.

“Don't you think that some of us energetic soldiers might get leave for the *Express* to take us on board to-morrow, and to follow the fleet down as far as Tangiers, say, eh, Cecil?” asked Hawthorne.

“If the admiral could be persuaded to ask the captain of the port for her, it

will be all right. I'm just going off; why don't some of you fellows come on board and see the old boy about it?"

"Wouldn't getting the governor to ask do as well?"

"Yes; but he's at the cottage, and won't be in to-day, so Sir Robert is your man."

"Well, I'll go for one. Come along, Bates, no one, from a ballet girl to an ancient mariner, can refuse you anything."

"All right, I'm game; but I bar the talking business; you must do that."

"You had better *bar* your eyeglass too," said Monkton; "the old boy don't like being reconnoitred at such close quarters. Good-bye, everybody. We'll hope to meet again as time rolls on. In the meantime a word of advice: wear flannel next your skin, and write to your mother occasionally."

"Funny fellow. Good-bye, old chap, good-bye."

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was a glorious morning, everything favourable for a start, when at 10.30 a.m. the *Thunderbomb*, the commander-in-chief's flagship, made a general signal “prepare to weigh.”

Boom boats had been hoisted in on the previous evening, and steam was up; the few small boats that had been left down for special duties were now hoisted, and every ship prepared for a move.

At 10.30 the admiral, accompanied by the flag captain, Le Hunte, and the flag lieutenant, our old friend Francis Daintree, came on deck, and was immediately joined by the commander and staff-commander, who had been waiting on the poop.

“How’s the wind, Steele?” asked Sir Robert.

“Seems pretty steady from W.S.W., sir,” replied the staff-commander.

“I thought so. The barometer’s steady. We will make a start, Le Hunte.”

“Aye, aye, sir. Mr. Wardlaw, make the general signal, to ‘weigh immediately.’ Captain Scott, carry on if you please.”

“Very good, sir,” and the commander left the group to give his orders.

“All under weigh except the *Resistance*, sir,” reported the flag-lieutenant, after some minutes had elapsed, during which the signalmen on the poop of the flagships had been carefully watching the remaining vessels.

“What is the matter with her?” said the admiral.

“She’s generally rather late, sir. She has no steam capstan.”

“Ah, well, she’ll be ready in lots of time to pick up her station in the fleet.

Hoist the signal 'form single column in line ahead.'

The *Thunderbomb* had weighed, and was now slowly steaming ahead in the direction of the Pearl Rock, being followed by the *Hercules*.

The fleet had been moored in two lines, the *Thunderbomb* at the head of one, the *Agincourt*, flagship of rear-admiral Lord William Parker, second in command, heading the other, and now the *Thunderbomb*'s line took the lead.

Slowly and majestically the huge monsters take station.

Thunderbomb and *Hercules*, *Penelope* and *Audacious*, these four formed the starboard or first division, now the leading column. After them came the second division, under the rear-admiral, comprising the *Agincourt*, *Sultan*, *Resistance*, and *Valiant*. The admiral's despatch vessel, the *Helicon*, took station about a couple of cables on the starboard beam of the flagship.

“There come our shore-going friends,” said the admiral, as the little *Express*, with a party of ladies and gentlemen on board, slipped from her buoy off the dockyard and steamed rapidly along the fleet, with much waving of hats and hand-kerchiefs, until she arrived abreast the *Thunderbomb*.

Hawthorne and Bates had evidently been successful in their mission to the admiral. They had, indeed, found that the gallant old gentleman had himself made every arrangement for a large party to be entertained on board the gun-boat, and was just sending off invitations in all directions through the flag-lieutenant.

“The admiral intends to proceed at eight knots.” Such was the next general signal made from the flagship, and the fleet in close order proceeded through the straits at that rate.

In those days—several years ago—this fleet of ironclads was one of the finest

that had been brought together, and people little thought that in a few years one half of the ships composing it would be placed in the Reserve, and the other considered almost obsolete.

Turrets and batteries, rams and torpedoes, are having their day. What next? Pen and ink, and diplomacy. Paper ships and the millennium. Who can tell?

Any ordinary ironclad is a regular floating village, with seven or eight hundred inhabitants. A young gentlemen's academy, presided over by the naval instructor for the midshipmen; a board school under the naval schoolmaster for the ship's boys; blacksmith's forges, carpenter's benches, tailors, barbers, shoemakers, coopers, a village band, a village dispensary, etc., etc., to say nothing of the complicated machinery, in the management of which scores of stokers under the engineers are constantly employed. When we remember that we have not yet mentioned anything

about the actual bluejackets forming the crew, with their officers, their gun-drills, their sail-drills, and now in these days of naval brigades, their field exercise and battalion drill, it is easy to understand that the captain of a man-of-war has his work cut out.

The ships were nearly abreast Tangiers, when Sir Robert called for the signal midshipman of the watch to bring a slate. The Slug, appearing from behind the chart house, which it was his constant care to keep between himself and the authorities, touched his cap, and held the slate whilst the admiral wrote. “From admiral to the ladies—Hope you are enjoying your trip. Delighted that we have such splendid weather. Am now going to drink your very good health, and to our merry meeting again next summer. There, signal that by semaphore to the *Express*.”

In two or three minutes back came the answer from the ladies.

“Many thanks; enjoying our trip immensely; intend drinking ‘absent friends’ religiously every day until your return next year.”

The admiral chuckled as the reply was reported to him, and saying “Come along, Le Hunte, that ought to give us an appetite for luncheon; bless their hearts!” went below.

Shortly after two o’clock, the *Express* asked permission to “part company,” and the *Thunderbomb* having affirmed it, every one went on deck to see the last of her.

The little craft stopped and allowed the fleet to steam past her, and, though not on board her at the time, I have it on good authority that the following tunes were played by the bands of the different iron-clads as they went by :

H.M.S. *Thunderbomb*, by special request of Lieutenant Daintree—who of course had a well-beloved in the *Express*—“Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye,” and

“The girl I left behind me ;” H.M.S. *Hercules*, “Only a little mountain lad,” and “Dinna forget ;” H.M.S. *Penelope*, “Little maid of Arcadie ;” H.M.S. *Audacious*, “Come, sit by my side, little darling ;” H.M.S. *Agincourt*, “Then you’ll remember me ;” H.M.S. *Sultan*, “Oh Kafoozlum ;” H.M.S. *Resistance*, “We’d better bide a wee ;” and H.M.S. *Valiant*, “We don’t want to fight, but by jingo if we do !”

As the last ship passed the *Express*, the little craft signalled “Farewell, pleasant cruise,” to which the flag-ship replied, “Thank you, farewell,” and with more waving of handkerchiefs, perhaps with some wiping of eyes, the gun-boat started off at full speed for her buoy once more, meaning, to quote that ancient sea ditty, “The man at the Nore :”

Meanin’ a buoy for the ships wot sail,
And not a boy wot’s a juvenile male.

Cecil Monkton was officer of the afternoon watch—12 to 4—and just as the *Thunderbomb*’s band finished, “Good bye,

sweetheart, good bye," Dicky Ormby—who was one of the midshipmen of the watch—sidled up to him on the poop, and pointed to Daintree, who, utterly regardless of admiral, flag captain, and *bosses* of all descriptions by whom he was surrounded, leant pensively against the signal lockers, and elaborately wiped his eyes.

Cecil laughed, and Daintree was not so overwhelmed with grief as to be unable to see that it was at *him*. With a comically resigned air he joined Cecil, who whispered, "Let me give you the straight tip in the great moralizer's own words :

An onion will do well for such a shift,
Which in a napkin being close conveyed,
Shall in despite, enforce a watery eye.

"Why, Daintree, old fellow! why so sad? I thought you were anxious to get back to Portsmouth. This is a very poor compliment to the Southsea girls."

"Oh! It's not sorrow at leaving Gib

that causeth these tears to flow," lisped Daintree, tragically waving his handkerchief, and slowly returning it to the pocket from which, truth to tell, it need never have been taken. "No, no," he continued, "it's not present sorrow, but rather the bitterness of past recollections that forceeth up the silent tear." And the little man gave a huge sigh.

I don't think I have mentioned yet that he was a small man with dark hair, laughing eyes, and an expression which grew more whimsical as his words became more melancholy.

"The bitterness is now overpast," he continued. "I've just put my sad story into verse. You shall hear it if you like, and so may little Ormby; perchance it may be a warning to him. I call it 'First love; a sorrowful story.' It runs like this:

There was a little midshipman,
A lively, cheery lad :
 His curls were crisp,
 A gentle lisp,
His messmates said he had.

There also was a spinster
A frisky, gushing gal;
Nor prim, nor staid,
That artless maid —
Her 'pa a general.

The maiden owned to twenty four,
The youth fifteen, about;
The youth was fat —
But what of that?
The maid was passing stout.

The youth was baptised "Francis,"
The maid was christened "Sal;"
Scarce five foot he,
Just five six she,
He dearly loved that gal.

He didn't care, he told her so —
He didn't care a rap
For other girls —
She smooth'd his curls,
And took him on her lap.

He'd give them up, he told her so —
He'd give up rank and pay;
He would retire,
His martial fire
To warm love should give way.

I think she kiss'd his rosy lips,
I know she call'd him "*dear*,"
Then asked if he
Would groomsman be,
To 'cousin Sam' next year.

Methinks again I see him star',
I hear the sigh he hove;
That man he cursed —
He was the first
Cursed by that little cove.

She tried to calm him with a sweet
He brushed the drop aside;
No lollipop,
Yet acid drop,
That tear he strove to hide.

Then quickly from her lap he slid,
He slid down on the floor;
 Nor girls, nor tops,
 Nor lollipops,
He'd never love no more.

Defective though his grammar was,
'Twas right—for truth to tell—
 From then till now
 He's kept that vow,
Not wisely, but too well.'

Daintree's voice grew very melancholy, but in his eyes shone the light of a great contentment, as he pointed towards the little *Express* steaming away in the distance, and continued,

Within *that* ship a matron stands,
Six olive branches by her;
 Her full blown charms
 Scarce could these arms
Entwine—her name is Myer.

Within *this* ship a bachelor stands;
A bach'lor grave and saintly.
 Yes! Yes! 'tis he,
 Once more I see
That youth! his name is—

“ *Daintree!* ” screamed the Nipper, who could restrain his anxious lungs no longer.

“ Midshipman of the watch! ” roared the commander's voice from the fore-

bridge. “Where on earth is the midshipman of the watch?”

Away went Ormby, rushing wildly for’ard, expecting at the very least to have a week’s leave stopped, or be given “Watch and Watch,” for being away from his station.

Commander Scott did not as a general rule make a midshipman’s life altogether a bed of roses; but, luckily for Dicky’s chance of an early run on shore at Portsmouth, the men had been working well, and consequently the commander was inclined to be a little easy.

“ ‘Hem! It’s you is it?’ he said, as the Nipper presented a gloomy, expectant face above the bridge, and feeling it superfluous to reply that it unfortunately *was* him, touched his cap with anxious reverence.

“How often am I to tell you, sir, that the Lee side of the quarter deck is the place for the midshipman of the

watch, unless he is ordered away on duty?"

The Nipper considered it unadvisable to specify any particular number of times, so waited for yet another question of submissive attention.

"Where were you, eh?"

Dicky might easily have made the excuse that he had been on the poop to make a report, but telling "cuffers" was not his forte.

"I went to speak to the officer of the watch for a minute, sir," he said.

"Who is the officer of the watch?"

"Mr. Monkton, sir," and the gloom on the poor Nipper's countenance deepened, and his vision of "leave stopped," extended rapidly from a week to a fortnight, for Cecil Monkton was no friend of the commander's. However, gloomy visions vanished, as—glad to have a hit at Monkton—the latter muttered, "of course, it's useless blaming youngsters for shirk-

ing their work when lieutenants set them the example. Tell the captain of marines that I shall be obliged if he will give orders that the sentry on the top-gallant forecastle is to wear his great coat at night *only*. The fellow's lashed up *now*—in the middle of the afternoon, by gad!—like a slop drinking, clog flopping old woman," and, having delivered himself of his polite speech, he turned away and began rapidly pacing the narrow bridge, seeking whom he might be down upon next.

The Nipper was off like a rocket, and quickly gladdened the heart of Captain Garton of the R.M.L.I. with his civil message.

It was not until nearly four o'clock that he had a chance of speaking to Monkton again. Then he had to carry to him the ship's log, to be written up and signed at the end of the watch.

"Well, Dicky, out with it!" said Cecil.

“ Which was it, watch and watch, or leave stopped ? ”

“ The commander is too thoroughly pleased with my general good conduct to punish so zealous an officer for a slight offence, especially as he knows that the lieutenants encourage us youngsters to shirk our duty.”

“ Did he say that ? Confound him ! ”

“ Hulloh, Monkton, your turn now,” said the captain of marines. “ He'll talk at you for a week about that.”

“ Who's afraid ? ” laughed Cecil. “ Have you called my relief, Ormby ? ”

“ Yes, sir. He was having a caulk and tried to gain a little time by pretending that it wasn't his first dog.”

“ That's just like Spencer. He'd better wake up and have all his wits about him, for the admiral intends to alter the formation of the fleet soon. By Jove ! here comes the old boy to see it done himself.”

Eight bells struck, and after turning over the orders—speed and course of the ship, formation of the fleet, employment of the watch, etc.—to Spencer, Cecil went below, taking the Nipper with him to have a cup of cocoa in the ward-room.

Leaving the officer of the watch—his sextant in one hand, his telescope in the other—to keep his station and enjoy life, if he can, we will send for a third cup, and join Cecil and the Nipper.

“I had a letter from Vi this morning,” commenced the latter; “she sent her love to you, Cecil.”

“Ah! What news had she? Anything startling going on at home?”

“No; your people are blooming; your mother took Vi to a dance at Tunbridge Wells last week. Vi says she danced every dance, and, as far as I can make out, she’s started a violent flirtation with some fellow or other.”

“And that’ all, ehs? Nothing very new

in that. We've heard of her doing the same thing before."

"She was awfully down upon me at the end of her letter," said Dicky, rather dolefully.

"Why, what have you been up to?"

"Well, you see we've had a long spell in harbour, and the uncle won't allow me more than the regulation £50 a year; and what with our dance, and the riding parties, and a million other things, I was obliged to write home for more coin a little while ago."

"Then allow me to tell you, young fellow, that you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Here you are, a boy, not much over sixteen, with eighty odd pounds a-year, not to mention payment of outfitters' bills, railway fares, and sundry odd tips on high days, and yet you come down on your uncle, who, you know jolly well, can't afford to do more for you. I'm precious glad Vi dropped on you."

“Don’t preach, Cecil, old fellow ; please don’t. She said just the same, and a lot more, and I felt a perfect scoundrel, you know.” The Nipper looked so mournful that much lecturing was out of the question, and Cecil was glad of the excuse to say no more.

Our little friend Dicky, was, by no manner of means, like the resolute party in the song, who expresses such a settled determination to “mourn, and mourn, and mourn.” I think his spirits must have been, if anything, more buoyant, more hopeful, more—generally blithesome, than those of the songster.

Let us suppose that they were ; it strikes me that that would be more in keeping with the character we want.

Here goes, then ; away with melancholy !

The Nipper, trying as hard to keep back his laughter, as he had, before that little digression of mine, to keep back his tears, continued :

“I’m going to be awfully careful. I’ve given up jam and mixed biscuits, which are ‘extras’ with us, and I’m thinking seriously of starting a ‘savings bank’ account directly we arrive at Portsmouth. The worst of it is, the least they’ll take in one deposit is a bob, and I can’t run to that; I’m only good for ninepence half-penny.”

“Well, you most irrepressible young humbug, promise me one thing; that, rather than bother Mr. Ormby and Vi again, you will let me be your savings banker.”

“No, no, sir; you are my ‘sea dad;’ don’t let us mix up any other character with that; goodness knows, I’m deep enough in your debt already!” and Dicky looked up at his “sea daddy” with glistening eyes.

There I go again, I can’t help it! The Nipper will be affectionate, and I only meant him to be noisy and lively. However, I give it up; the first idea falls through, and to my middie’s good and bad qualities

please add—affection. Cocoa and milk paste, as supplied by “Moore,” is filling at the price—sevenpence half-penny, army and navy co-operative—and our two friends and ourselves have had enough of it.

“I must go and do a baccy,” said Cecil. “Have you got any novels? If not, there are two or three new ones in my cabin, if you like to go and dig them out.”

“I’ll come and yarn, whilst you smoke, if you don’t mind,” said Dicky.

“All right, come along!”

“By-the-bye, Cecil, Vi tells me that a man called Armstrong—a young, unmarried man, she says—has taken ‘Old Court,’ the house old Dent lived in, and which has been vacant, goodness knows how long.”

“Armstrong!” exclaimed Cecil; “I’m hanged if I don’t believe that’s the man I knocked over at Gib. That will be awkward, eh?”

“Not if you feel equal to knocking him over again,” said Dicky, as they entered the

smoking place, which was screened off between a couple of guns, on the main deck.

About a dozen fellows were congregated there, lounging around a pair of large spit-kids. All were members of the ward-room mess—the gun-room had a separate place—and all were blowing clouds of smoke.

The commander, whose temper did not seem to have improved, was smoking a cigarette. He looked up, superciliously, as they sat down, and then, in a perfectly audible tone, asked Steele, the staff-commander, if there was anything the matter with the gun-room smoking place. Ormby, of course, looked uncomfortable; the rest of the officers present eyed the commander with disgust, and Cecil, with an oath, which certainly reached the ears for which it was intended, said, “We shan’t have any drill to-night, Dicky, so I’ll play you a game of chess in the gun-room, if your fellows *don’t mind* my coming there,” strong emphasis on the last few words. “Nice man, isn’t he?”

he continued, when they were clear of the ward-room. "Holy of holies! it's quite a relief to get away from his thin lips and bloodshot eyes."

"Yes; that's all very well," said Dicky; "you know how I hate the beast," and Dicky murmured feelingly the words of a gun-room ditty, which expressed the earnest wish :

May he sink down in a rocky, rocky shoal;
May the sharks take his body, and the devil take his soul,
Ri fol de ray, Ri fol de ray, &c.

"But you've lost your smoke through me," he said.

"Never mind that. By Jove, Dicky, I hope things will be very different before long. They're too absurd, now. Separate smoking places, separate messes, separate treatment in every way; it seems hard to imagine that ward-room and gun-room officers are of the same breed. The objection to having such youngsters as junior midshipmen in a ward-room mess, which many of the *good old* school look upon as

insurmountable, is all skittles, humbug ! I blow it away ; I laugh at it, Dicky, my boy. To begin with, there's no necessity for midshipmen to be sent to regular sea-going ships until they are, say, sixteen, and old enough to keep quiet and behave decently at dinner. Then, directly after mess, they might still have a sort of gun-room, but on a smaller scale, to which they might retire and skylark. It would do the youngsters good, and therefore gradually improve the whole tone of the service, and we'll see it come off yet, Dicky, my boy !

‘No rock so hard, but that a little wave
May beat admission in a thousand years.’

Tennyson says that, and he's right, Dicky, my boy.”

“ Why, you're quite excited about it, Cecil.”

“ *Well*, I may be ! It means general improvement. No more rowdyism.”

The Nipper didn't say much ; he was not so particularly keen on long ward-room

dinners with an old doctor, or paymaster, perhaps, oh, horror! the naval instructor as next door neighbour, and the certainty of being rigidly fixed until after the Queen's health had been drunk.

At six o'clock the gun-room dinner began, and shortly before that Cecil strolled off to his cabin, and buried himself in a novel until the dressing bugle went at a quarter to seven; for the ward-room dinner at sea was at seven o'clock.



CHAPTER V.

ERE you are! Walk up! Walk up!
All in to begin! Come and see
the animals feed! Sound the gong,
Villiam!

It is 7 p.m.; the dinner bugle has just sounded, and, before the last note has died away, almost everyone is at his place. If sea air can't give a man an appetite, I will go further, and say, an absolute *craving* for food, much food, I should like to hear what can. The chaplain, for a wonder, is late, so we have time to "cast our eyes around us," Silas Wegg-like

We are all on the after part of the lower deck, in a large room, with a table at the fore end of it, around which seats for about six-and-twenty officers are now placed;

cabins, with sliding doors, jalousies and green curtains are on each side of the room, and in the after part, right at the stern, are ports with lounges, or, in naval parlance, lockers, directly under them. A large skylight gives plenty of light and air. Swinging lamps, small swinging tables, a piano, several arm-chairs, sideboards, and a few pictures, etc., form the furniture.

Two taps on the table from the president ; “Thank God !” from the chaplain—who has just arrived—and the feed has commenced. Spencer is president for the week ; the officers take it in turn.

“Not often that the Church isadrift at feeding-time,” he said, looking at the parson. “What’s the meaning of it, bishop ? Saturday night, and no sermon ready for to-morrow, I suppose !”

“Eh? What?” exclaimed the fleet surgeon, a rather deaf and irritable old gentleman. “No sermon to-morrow, did you say ? What ?”

No notice was taken of his question. Questioning was his normal condition, and after firing off a volley of Eh's and What's, he returned to his soup.

The ward-room dinner-party to-night was complete—no clubs or hotels to offer any attractions—and consisted of the commander, six lieutenants, staff-commander, captain, and two subalterns of marines, three doctors, fleet and staff surgeons, and surgeon, paymaster, and senior assistant paymaster, chaplain, naval instructor, and chief engineer. Daintree also was dining in the ward-room, as he was, of course, an honorary member of the mess, although the seniors of an admiral's staff, namely, the flag-captain, flag-lieutenant, and secretary always mess with the admiral.

“ Well, doctor ! ” said Monkton—the senior surgeon is always *the* doctor—“ Well, doctor ; clear of women for a week ? Glorious, isn't it ? ”

“Eh? clear of 'em, are we? We're never clear of 'em. What? None on board? What of that? Won't you and young susceptible there”—jerking his head towards Daintree—“talk about them, eh? Won't you think about them, eh? Shall we hear of anything but women from him, eh?—Ugh !”

“I must thay,” said Daintree, “that, as a topic of conversation, I think them dethidedly amuthing. We're better without them at thea, though ; mind you, doctor, I thay only at thea.”

“Eh? amusing are they, at sea? Better go to a troop-ship, then, hadn't you? What?”

“I thaid I did *not* want them at thea, and I don't think I could enjoy life in a trooper.”

“What? Think you could enjoy life in a trooper, eh? You needn't shout. What?”

Daintree gave it up, and turning to Garton said : “I once thought theriously of going in for a trooper, but a fellow who'd

been in the *Crocodile*, told me quite enough about the busineth to choke me off. I put one of hith many experiencesth into verthe. Would you like to hear it? It runs like thith:

Within a troop-thip'th chief thaloon
I that and thlept one afternoon,
"Twath rolling heavily, and thoon
I fell a dreaming.

I dreamt a tholdier pathed me by,
A thettled purpothe in hith eye,
Upon hith lipth the "tholdier'th thigh,"
"Oh, thteward! a bathin."

I dreamt the ladieth cabin door
Wath opened wide, and half a theore
Of female headth thrust out to roar
"Oh, thteward! a bathin."

I dreamt the babieth woke and thqualled,
And loudly for their motherth called,
And louder thtill the nurtheth bawled
"Oh, thteward! a bathin."

I dreamt each eddy round about,
Each cat'th paw, white horthe, water thpout,
Clothed round me with the mocking thout,
"Oh, thteward! a bathin."

I dreamt each wave and gentle thwell,
Each ripple ath it rothe and fell,
Look'd up, and whithpered, "what! not well?"
"Oh, thteward! a bathin."

I dreamt the thoundth and thignth of woe,
Recall'd from out the "long ago,"
A thpathm! and I murmured low,
"Oh, thteward! a bathin."

I dreamt—but no, the dream had fled,
Motherth and babieth!—in their ththead,
A thirthty naval man thouted,
"Hi! thteward! a tumbler."

“Bravo, Daintree! You’ll make a convert of him yet, doctor. A few months in a trooper, and he’d be a regular woman-hater,” said the parson, a big, jovial-looking man, who had been in the ‘Varsity football team, and had rowed in his college “eight” at “John’s,” Cambridge.

“Eh? Daintree hate a woman? Bah! He couldn’t do it. What? Loves them all, does he? There’s some safety in that. What? Shall I tell you a story, eh?”

The doctor’s stories, at the expense of the fair sex, were, occasionally, amusing, so this time his questioning “Eh?” was answered by a general “Go it, doctor! Fire away!” and a faint murmur of “It’th too bad,” from Daintree.

“Many years ago,” began the doctor.

“No, no,” cried Daintree. “Oneth upon a time; oneth upon a time.”

“Eh? you’ll tell the story, will you? What?”

“Go on, doctor; go on,” said his reverence, James Clarke.

“Many years ago, gentlemen, when I was quite a boy—”

“Oh! I apologise, then,” interrupted Daintree; “that mutht have been *many* yearsth ago.”

“Shut up, Daintree.” Monkton’s hand squeezed the little man’s neck, and the doctor, looking very irate, continued his story, or rather his series of questions and answers.

“D’ye know Mevagissey Loo?”

“Any relation of Thauthy Kate, or Thumping Thal?” whispered Daintree to Garton.

“Don’t be an idiot! It’s the name of a place. Let the old boy go on; he’ll answer his own questions.”

“Don’t know Mevagissey Loo?” resumed the doctor. “What? No, it isn’t in ‘Thom-erthet,’ Master Francis; it’s in Cornwall. What about it, eh? Well, there used to

be a small village church near there, which I occasionally attended. The parson was a good sort, but primitive. What? not a theological genius like Clarke, eh? Ugh! He had a wife, poor devil, eh? One of the ordinary kind—wife vulgaris, eh? Didn't she scold! Didn't she worry! Didn't she rave at him, eh? And how did he retaliate? Listen! He worked for the best, poor devil, but he failed. It was Sunday morning; the village church was crowded. What? Was I there? I was. My primitive friend—you know, the parson, eh?—he chose for his text that oft-neglected command, ‘Wives obey your husbands.’ He spoke with feeling—deep feeling—for some considerable time. Was I asleep? What? It is possible. In those days I slept on the slightest provocation. My winks at any rate were few. Though not generally an excitable man in the pulpit, my friend's subject was one of strong personal interest. He warmed to it.

What? He grew positively noisy over it; and seizing his prayer book—or was it a hymn book, eh? I forget—he said, ‘My brethren, there is, in this church, a woman of whom, for her persistent disobedience of, and resistance to, marital authority, I deem it necessary to make an example. I shall, therefore, personally and publicly, in the presence of this congregation, cast a book at the head of that offender against the laws of God and man.’ Poor devil! He thought that his own wife was the only one of the kind! Are you attending, you Daintree? Are you listening, eh? Yes! All right. Well, the parson paused, looked solemnly around, and then quickly raised the book on high—a rustle, a waving of feathers, and, gentlemen, messmates—*every woman's head in that congregation was ducked!* *Not one woman* but imagined that the parson intended to pick her out as the example! Need I say more, eh? One word. What? Women are the same now as they

were then in Mevagissey or in London ; if the same thing happened, there would still be ducks amongst any congregation of women. What?"

"I quite agree with your last remark," said Daintree : "there are *ducks* amongst any congregation of women."

"Ducks, eh ? Don't talk nonsense. You think with the mad warblers of the present day that 'The sailor's wife the sailor's star shall be,' eh ? 'That the ship will tack and the tar come back, to the first love of his heart,' etc., etc., eh ? *I* know you. What ? You are a good example, eh ? Can you remember who was your *first love* ? If you could, would you go back to her ? What ? not you, you humbug ! What sailor with a wife isn't a miserable object, eh ? In England, isn't he a nuisance to his brother officers because he wants to take tea with his *star*, when it's his day for duty ? On a foreign station, isn't he a melancholy kill-joy because his *star* is enjoying life on her

own account 'ten thousand miles away? What? Who would care to always live by star-light? *Star* indeed. What? She's a *shooting* star, that's what she is, and the poor married man is the tattered target. That's about it, eh? Bah!"

The doctor fiercely attacked his bread crumbs.

"Doctor, you're quite incorrigible," said the parson. "Do allow that there are *some* nice women."

"Where? Eh? I fancied I'd come across something really superior the other day. We were talking of matrimony——"

"Ho! ho! sly dog," came in a disguised voice from a short distance down the table. "Talking matrimony, were you, sly dog?"

A grim smile flickered for a moment through the old boy's moustache at the idea of his doing anything beyond *talk* of matrimony.

"What was I saying when that playful

officer interrupted me?" he continued. "Oh, I know. The superior girl and I were talking on the subject which appears to have so great an attraction for our facetious messmate, when she observed, with a snigger, that when she married, instead of saying, 'Love, honour, and obey,' she intended to say, 'Love and honour *in a way*.' Eh? Funny joke, wasn't it? Awful wit, wasn't it? What? I talked no more. I wanted to be quiet; I felt sick. What?"

"I see nothing in it but an ordinary girl's joke," remarked Daintree, in a casual tone.

"Oh! you see nothing in it, don't you? And pray what were you asked to see in it, eh? I merely mentioned it—an ordinary girl's joke—as a sample of what girls' jokes ordinarily are. What?"

"Now, order! order!" said the president. "How are you getting on with your 'naval chaplain,' Daintree?"

The flag lieutenant rose to the bait

eagerly. “ Oh ! I’ve finished my shot at the church. Will you have it ? All right. It runs like this :—

THE NAVAL CHAPLAIN.

I take him first—the highest place
Is given at sea to those who grace
 The pulpit weekly.
He needs no rank, he proudly stands
On board his ship above all hands
 However meekly.

Whether he be “ high or low,”
“ Evangelical and slow,”
 Or “ broad ” as Stanley.
Whether he be thin or fat,
Whether tall or, failing that,
 Strong built and manly ;

Should he be always good and kind ;
A gentleman in deed and mind,
 Or only seem so ?
Professionally he’s a blank,
Perfect and absolute in rank,
 See “ latest memo.”

Sea-going parsons, by the way,
I’ve heard some clever earthlings say,
 Serve only mammon ;
But then there many laymen be
Who say the Church, by land *and* sea,
 Deals much in gammon.

Our chaplain is a sportsman keen,
And knows full well the points, I ween,
 Of dogs and horses.
And—who shall blame if I confess--
Can tell a “ racy ” yarn at mess,
 Between the courses.

A broad-brimm'd, long-tailed, white-tied priest,
He looks a rural dean at least,
 Or bigger gun ;
As in his diocese each day,
By "my lord's" orders he will pray
 Full minutes, one.

The day's work done, in sombre suit
Of grey enveloped, hat to boot,
 He goes ashore.
The hat is narrow-brimm'd, and high,
The coat-tail's been "dock'd," and the tie
 Is white no more.

He smokes his pipe—a fool might guess
His fav'rite drink is B and S,
 Or gin and ginger.
He'll tell you with his titheless wink,
"Jndicious use of well-mixed drink,
 No man can injure."

And so he smokes, and so he drinks,
So oft with cheery joke he winks
 In moderation.
Don't blame ! our "bishop" knows his men,
Good *messmate* first, the *priest* may then
 Gain toleration."

" That's not bad, Daintree," said the "bishop," laughing. " I'll split what you are pleased to call my favourite drink with you shortly after dinner."

" Are we to have the band to night, Dare ?" asked the commander.

" Yes ; they'll strike up in a minute. I told them to commence late so that we might manage a dance after dinner."

“ Buck dancing with midshipmen ! Grand sport I should think,” sneered Commander Scott.

“ You pays your money and you takes your choice,” said Dare. “ I don’t suppose that the youngsters will insist upon your dancing with them if you don’t wish to.” The commander glared at him. “ Mind you are my partner to-night,” continued Dare, turning to the subaltern of Marine Artillery. “ We’ll work up the ‘Southsea Crawl’ again, the regular Eastney Barrack tip.”

“ How people’s ideas have altered ! ” said the paymaster, as, after the Queen’s health had been drunk, the most regular of the smokers commenced to make a move. “ Why, twelve or fifteen years ago, an officer in the navy was ashamed to be seen smoking in uniform. I’ve even known the officers of a ship in the Mediterranean fleet hire a boat at Malta and ‘lay off’ in her to enjoy their baccy,

rather than allow their men to see them smoking on board. Now, an officer who doesn't smoke is quite the exception. Bring me a cigar."

"Chewing is going out of fashion amongst the men," said Steele. "If they were only allowed more time for smoking, the filthy quid would soon become altogether a thing of the past."

"Spoken like a book," said Monkton. "There's the band; 'Sweethearts,' by Jove! I'd forgotten that it was Saturday night. Come along! Let's join the festive dance."

The band was playing on the upper deck, and the gun-room fellows were hard at the mazy valse when the others arrived. Monkton soon spotted the Nipper, getting as much enjoyment out of the dance as anyone could hope for, with the Slug as a partner.

"Bentley said I was to dance the next with him," he said, as Cecil went up to him.

“Oh, I'll make it all square with him. We always have a fly round together.”

“Bentley will have a fly round me afterwards,” said the Nipper, dismally.

“Of course, I can explain that I dragged you off; one would think that your senior sub was a young god.”

Oh, my friend Cecil, you are woefully adrift this time; your explanation won't ease the Nipper off a single stroke! For some years past, bullying had gone out in most ships, and Cecil, as a midshipman, had been fortunate in his messmates. Systematic bullying had never fallen to his lot, and he had no idea that for the last few weeks, in fact since Bentley had joined the *Thunderbomb* as senior sub-lieutenant, the gun-room had almost become, what so many used to be, a perfect hell afloat. A wild polka, a mad set of quadrilles, and the “Buck dance” was over for the evening. “Rule Britannia,” quickly followed by “God

save the Queen," came as a wind-up, and then the gun-room fellows and a few of the ward-room started off for the former mess to drink "sweethearts and wives," and enjoy the usual Saturday night corobbary—that is, songs and general festivity.

For a wonder the commander had not interfered with or stopped the band to-night; pretending, as he often did, that it prevented some most necessary work being carried out. He was one of those men—and how many of them there are! —who are anxious to keep their power *perpetually* before their junior's eyes. He and many other naval and military officers are always reminding me of the old yarn about the giver of a dignity ball at Jamaica, who, not satisfied with the amount of respect and attention he was receiving in his capacity of host, determined on asserting his position boldly. Waiting then, until the dance

was at its height, he exclaimed in a stentorian voice, “Stoppee de Bhand!” Then after having allowed the dancers to stare at him in astonishment and anxiety for some moments, a flourish of the coloured gentleman’s hand was followed by the order, “Go on de Bhand.”

After several repetitions of the above performance, one of the female guests, either Jose’fine Johnson or Sally Cook—which of those frail and dusky washerwomen was it?—ventured to ask, “Why you stoppee de Bhand, Massa Vaysey?”

“To show my ortorrrity,” replied the magnificent gentleman of colour.

Note the answer, arrogant, imperious human being, and consider how often you might have given the same when asked why you do so and so.

Our dignity ball is over, so we will be off to the gun-room, that palatial

residence, where sub-lieutenants and midshipmen, assistant paymasters, and clerks dwell together in—brotherly love would be the proper ending to the sentence; but I am nothing, if not truthful; and truth compels me to finish it thus—row and revellings. Six subs and sixteen midshipmen, two assistant paymasters and three clerks, occupy—and a little over—this cool retreat. About twenty of them are “at home” to-night, principally on the table, which takes up nearly the whole of the mess, and which it is necessary to utilize as a lounge on gun-room corobbarry nights.

Admiralty arrangements for home comforts scarcely make allowance for gun-room guests. The spacious “quarters” allotted to the oily sardine in its air-tight box would afford an excellent example of the roomy habitation and its inmates; absence of air and presence of grease being equally noticeable in each dwelling.

Don't be angry, bald-headed sub, still waiting for promotion at twenty-eight years of age; don't be angry, "dear little middy" of twenty-one, with beard, short jacket and dirk. I am not referring to our own times, it would be mutinous language; I dare not. Besides things are better now, are they not? These are days of light and patent ventilation, not closed scuttles and economy. Is it not so, eh? Ha! ha! ha! All we want now is boundless faith, unlimited hope, and any amount of charity.

But to return to the table. Besides some half-dozen midshipmen, who are reclining in easy and graceful attitudes; we have placed on various parts of it spirits of sorts, from the low gin (square) to the high class brandy. Our special chum, the oleaginous sardine is there, so is the blushing onion of Spain, and the rich sausage of Oxford, so are divers "assorted meats"—

Pâte de fois gras, etc., etc. Find a seat, keep cool, if possible, and “fall to” with a will. The Nipper, as the youngest officer present, is ordered to lead off with a song, and accordingly gives, in a shrill, desperate voice, “Here’s to the maiden of bashful fifteen ! Here’s to the widow of fifty !” A clanging of glasses and a general “rise of the spirits” of the party amply rewards the Nipper for his manly sentiments, and conviviality reigns supreme !

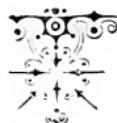
An endeavour of the Slug’s to impose “Far away” upon the company is promptly suppressed, and that heavily sentimental warbler is carried out, carefully deposited inside his chest, and a junior clerk stationed to sit on the lid, until the conclusion of the entertainment. Daintree obliges with “The *lath* that *loveth a Thailor* ;” Monkton gives “Hearts of Oak” and “The Rhine Wine ;” then we have “Tom Bowling,” “Farewell, my trim built wherry,” and various West Indian, Chinese, and other choruses. Song

follows song rapidly, also drink follows drink rapidly, until, at 10 p.m., the wardroom fellows have had enough of it. It is quite impossible to separate without a rocket, though ; *three* rockets in fact. Daintree, who is wildly cheerful on Saturday nights, stations himself upon the table to give the time. “Order! Order!” a sharp tap on the table from Daintree, then a gentle “Hish-sh-sh-sh” emanates from the same officer, and is joined in by all the others with increasing fervour until breath is exhausted. A general drumming with fists on the table quickly succeeds, then a sharp clap together, followed by a prolonged “Oh! oh! oh-o-o-o!” commenced with extraordinary vehemence and dying gradually away, as the first rocket disappears in the distance. Another succeeds and yet another.

Daintree—now in his glory—flatly refuses to either have another “tot” or to remove himself from his place of advantage, without the West Coast of Africa serf boat

song. The sides of the table are quickly "manned," fellows sitting on the edge, which represents the gunwale of the boat—sideways, facing towards Daintree, the steersman—with their legs dangling. The steersman takes the solo, the others keeping time by a couple of quick taps on the table—given in the serf boats by the paddles on the gunwale, and going through the motions of pulling a stroke between each two taps. "Hi-i-i-i!" shrieks Daintree, waving his arms and gesticulating wildly, "Man-o'-war he come again! come again! he come again!" The paddlers join in, singing, "Man-o'-war he come again! come again! he come again!" Then the steersman, in a higher key and louder shout, "Dash me dollar! Dash me sixpence!" the chorus going on as before, with the two taps coming in regularly at each "Man-o'-war," "White man he come again! Black man he run away!" yells again and again still higher and louder, as

he madly waves his imaginary paddle. Then he joins in with the chorus for a few strokes, breaking off once more to scream, “God will bless you ! God he berry good ! Hi-i-i-i,” and so on, and so on, until at last he is forcibly deposed and the ward-room fellows retire to their own diggings. A few more ditties, principally of a playful character, are sung, in the last of which, one of the subs, whilst endeavouring to state that “Miss Tickletoby kept a school,” became a trifle thick and incoherent, and eventually disappeared somewhat abruptly beneath the table, his tumbler and grog—his “ sole remaining joy”—preceding him.



CHAPTER VI.

TEN minutes past midnight ! The officer of the first watch—8 to 12—has just been relieved by the lieutenant who has to keep the “middle”—12 to 4—the men of the latter watch have been mustered and reported correct, and are now preparing to sleep under the forecastle until required for work with the watch, or to take their turn at the wheel, or on a look out.

One p.m. ! The two midshipmen of the watch have made cocoa for the officer of the watch on the poop, for the sub-lieutenant, or *mate* of the watch on the fore-bridge, and for themselves ; and are now curled up, half asleep, behind a gun. The officer of the watch, except for an

occasional stop at the speaking tube to the engine-room to order an increase or reduction in the number of "revolutions," as necessary to keep the ship in station, is steadily tramping—night glasses in hand—up and down the poop, and the "look out" men have just sung out the name of their station, as they are required to do each time the bell strikes—that is every half hour. No sails are set, so there will not be much for the watch to do to-night. One of the midshipmen of the watch has to go round the decks every hour to see all correct.

Down to the steerage now, where officers not entitled to cabins are swinging in their hammocks. No noise here. The only sign of life—and that of the faintest—is in the shape of a marine sentry who leans against the door opening on to the lower deck.

Three bells! Half past one! And from the upper deck we hear, "Starboard gang-

way ! ” “ Starboard cat-head ! ” “ Port gangway ! ” Port cat-head ! ” “ Life-buoy ! ” as the look-out men again hail in succession.

An uneven swing, certainly not caused by the rolling of the ship, is now noticeable in two hammocks hanging next each other, in the “after” row. A few moments pass, and then two pairs of legs encased in two pairs of flannel trousers, are cautiously thrust out. A moment more and the remaining portions of the owners of the “flannels” slip noiselessly over the side of their hammocks down to the deck. Both are dressed, and both have knives in their hands. What’s their little game ? Don’t expect a murder, bloodthirsty reader.

They evidently have a “little game,” and both are in it.

They stand still for a few minutes watching the sentry, who remains motionless against the door, then they glide quickly underneath the intervening hammocks to

the *foot* of one which is slung close to the ladder. Arrived there, the little game is over as far as one of them is concerned, for after a few hurried whispers with his companion, he closes his knife and turns to go back.

A muttered oath and threat from the other produces no effect, and back goes first villain. The remaining one creeps silently along the hammock until he arrives at its *head*, and then commences to cut the “laniard”—the rope by which it hangs—close to the beams. In another minute, a rustle is heard; then a heavy fall is heard, and a figure disappears swiftly up the hatchway.

The sound of the fall was quite enough to arouse the sentry, who marching—can a sentry-going machine run!—to the spot, discovered the poor little Nipper lying on the deck perfectly insensible, and with blood flowing freely from a large wound in the side of his head, made apparently

by an iron bolt in the combings of the hatchway, directly under his hammock.

Officers sleeping around quickly awoke, and the Nipper was carried off to the sick bay, for the doctor's inspection.

“It's not my middle watch, quarter-master. What are you calling me for?” This came slowly and rather indistinctly from Dicky as they laid him on a cot. “Why, what's up?” he murmured again. “What's up? I feel like a boiled owl!”

The doctors now arrived, and the fleet surgeon having told Dicky to “shut up,” which indeed was a superfluous order—the little man having fainted directly after having likened himself to the cooked bird—proceeded to stop the bleeding and bandage him up.

“How did it happen, eh? Fell out of his hammock, did he? What? Don't believe a word of it. Never knew a midshipman *fall* out of his hammock yet. Some funny practical joker, or damned

bully's at the bottom of it. Thing to be proud of, isn't it? Eh?" And the old doctor looked up quickly and searchingly at the half-dozen faces around him—sorrowful faces they were too.

"Of course he fell out," said Bentley, who had followed the others to the sick bay, and was now standing, dressed, at a short distance from the doctor. "No one would cut the boy down," he continued, "or if they did, they'd let him down *feet*, not *head*, first."

"Who talked of cutting down? Eh?—Your middle watch, I suppose, Bentley? Wonder you never undressed though. Eh?" The doctor again glanced—suspiciously this time—along the group, and although not appearing to notice it, his quick eye spotted another individual who had not undressed that night.

"Please don't let me keep you up, gentlemen. It has been a good night's work for us. Eh? Or perhaps we had better say—

for *two* of us. Eh? It will be my proud task to discover and thank them for it. The whole case will naturally be reported to the captain in the morning. Good night, gentlemen; *Good* night." The party trooped out, leaving the doctors with their patient.

"The old boy suspects bullying," said an assistant paymaster. "I never knew him so nasty before."

"Bullying be hanged, and you too," growled Bentley. "Even supposing that the little imp was cut down, it won't do him any harm; and it's not likely that that old fossil of a sawbones will find out who did it, as, of course, no fellow could be sneak enough to report a messmate," and he gave a meaning scowl at Rice, the sub the doctor had noticed as not having undressed. Two or three fellows who stood in special dread of the senior sub laughed; but the others were silent, and all prepared to "turn in."

Then came various jumps and sundry exposures of undraped forms as the inhabitants of the steerage—with the small amount of decency which is possible in the manœuvre—swung themselves into their hammocks.

I may as well run on a little way, and say at once what happened with regard to the “cutting down.”

The next afternoon the doctor came across Bentley and Rice walking together, and apparently having hot words over that very subject. He joined them, evidently much to the annoyance of the former, and plunged at once into the matter.

“ Well, Rice, you’ve something to tell me? Eh? Better make a clean breast of it? Eh? Then I’ll try and pass it off to the captain as a practical joke. Perhaps Mr. Bentley will treat us to his version of the *joke*? Eh?” The doctor’s malicious look at Bentley as he said this, and the muttered “Brute! What?” with which he ended it in an in-

tended aside, was too good. He disliked Bentley intensely, and the feeling was more than reciprocated.

“If I hadn’t a fool to deal with, you would never know more about it than you do now,” said the latter ; “you’d better be careful to let your Christian conscience speak for yourself and about yourself *only*, my scrupulous friend,” he continued, turning his scowling face towards Rice, “or there will be more broken heads before long,” and away he walked.

An hour later Bentley and Rice found themselves before Captain Le Hunt, who—a thoroughly honest, straightforward man himself—had been disgusted beyond measure with the former’s brutal behaviour ; the doctor having managed to get the true story of the last night’s proceedings out of Rice.

Speaking first to Bentley, who, for once, looked a little crestfallen, he said : “I consider, sir, that you have been guilty

of a most cowardly piece of bullying, practical joking it *cannot* be called. We are to be 'paid off' on our return to Portsmouth, or I should insist upon your leaving a ship which you have disgraced on more than one occasion. The state of affairs in the gun-room since you became its senior member is not altogether unknown to me, and the admiral's report to the admiralty on your conduct will be far from favourable. That will do; you may leave my cabin, sir. Mr. Rice," he continued, when the door had closed upon Bentley, "I am by no means pleased at the part which you have played in this business. I can quite believe—in fact, your conduct puts it beyond doubt—that you imagined that a practical joke *only* was to be played, and Mr. Ormby's hammock let down *foot* first, but when you found that Mr. Bentley, out of pure spite, had determined on such a brutal proceeding as

letting him down by the head, you, instead of returning to your hammock and quietly awaiting the result, should have *at once* put a stop to it. That you feel disgusted now, at Mr. Bentley's conduct, you have shown by reporting it to me; and I can only express my sorrow that the feeling has come too late to benefit young Ormby's head."

Rice, a decent enough young fellow, but too easily led, spoke a few words of regret, and left the cabin.

Bentley, and some of his satellites—loose fish, most of them—who thought him a rattling good fellow, deuced good sort, etc., tried hard to persuade the other gun-room fellows to send Rice to Coventry, or to cob him for sneaking, as they called it; but the Nipper was a general favourite, and Bentley had by no means increased his popularity by his recent playful joke. The Nipper's mess-

mates were—as, thank goodness, most naval officers are—a good lot, ready for jokes certainly, rough jokes if necessary, at any moment of the day or night, but decidedly adverse to brutality. There they drew the line, and it struck most of them, that on this occasion, Bentley had overstepped it.

So much for the “cutting down.” I don’t suppose anything would have been heard of it had not the Nipper’s head suffered so severely. In the “good old times” it was a constant source of *amusement* with even more amusing (?) results; but a midshipman’s skull is not to be broken with impunity now-a-days. Think of that Royal Middy! Try back, gentle reader.

It is Sunday morning; half-past eight o’clock. The gun-room breakfast is over, except for the fellows who have been keeping the morning watch. The ward-room breakfast is just beginning. Man-

of-war's men have to be early birds on board their ships, however late they may cling to the sheets when on shore. They have a lot of sleep to make up then. Night watches are not all "moonlight and peaceful tranquillity," quite the contrary.

The chaplain and the doctor were first at the table. The civilian branches are generally "all there when the bell strikes," small blame to them.

"How is young Ormby this morning, doctor?" inquired his reverence. "I hear he had a nasty blow."

"Oh, he'll be all right in a day or two. Nice tea this, isn't it? Eh? Ditch water. Capital coffee too. Eh? Beastliness! Steward, give me a bottle of claret."

Monkton now appeared from his cabin, and went to see the Nipper, who was again in his hammock in the steerage. When he returned, looking very vicious, he took a seat near the doctor, and

tried to find out all about it from him. Not much satisfaction to be got there.

“How did it happen? Eh? An infernally blackguard trick, was it? Deserves to be kicked? What? All right; you want to teach me my duty, I suppose? Eh? Shall I tell you something? Eh? I *know* it. I fancy I know the fellow who gave me the job, too. I believe I've got my eye on him. By God I do! What?”

That the old boy had his eye on him to some purpose we have already learnt.

“Well, you'll tell me the brute's name when you spot him, won't you, old fellow?” and Cecil's face beamed with delight at the very thought of how he would maul that brute after the doctor should have spotted him.

“I'll tell you nothing,” said the doctor, sipping his claret, and not looking altogether pleased with it. “The life of a man who had wilfully hurt your chum, the Nipper, wouldn't be worth a moment's

purchase *if* you could find him out. What? You *will* find him out, will you? Eh? I'll take good care you don't. Government can't afford to provide bandages for any more broken heads. What?"

Cecil laughed, and said that he rather thought he should find out. But the old doctor was right; Monkton only got as far as a suspicion as to who was the brute he was once so anxious, aye, blood-thirsty, to *spot*.

At 9.30 the bugles sound the "assembly," and the ship's company fall in in their respective "divisions" for inspection. It being the day of rest, every one comes up for inspection. Cooks and stewards, butchers and bakers, and fellows who spend their lives principally in store-rooms or tanks, all come up once a week to see the light of day, salute the captain, and praise the Lord, having first "swept and garnished" their store-room, tank, or other hiding place.

White frocks and trowsers, and white straw hats, is a neat “rig” for the men, and the bluejackets falling in on each side of the deck, with two companies of marines also in “whites,” look uncommonly well. The complement, all told, is about 720 men.

The lieutenants inspect their “divisions,” and then they and the captain of marines report all correct to the commander.

“First division,” “Tention,” “off hats!” and the captain—followed by the commander, lieutenant of division, senior doctor and about half-a-dozen smaller fry—passes along the first division of bluejackets, inspecting the men closely, and constantly stopping to ask questions concerning them.

On goes the procession! The band is playing on the poop now, so they have some music to march to. On they go, round the upper deck, passing the remain-

ing “divisions;” the stokers, and the *idlers*—that is the carpenters, blacksmiths, etc., who are *working* idlers; the cooks, stewards, etc. who are *excused* idlers—the former working with the hands during the day; the latter keeping no watch and doing no work on deck. Down dives the procession into the decks below, where a last spit and polish has just been given by the “sweepers,” who disappear up the fore ladder as the captain comes down the after one.

A quarter of an hour passes, during which the men have remained standing at ease on the upper deck, hearing the band discourse—possibly *sacred*, probably *secular*—music. Such midshipmen as have been able to escape behind the boom boats have been tossing for “drinks” at luncheon, and most of the other officers have gathered on the quarter deck, and are engaged in chaffing “the boy,” as the subaltern of the R.M.L.I. is nicknamed.

The procession emerges from the lower regions, and the commander gives orders to sound the disperse. “Sweeping and garnishing,” which has been going steadily on since 5 a.m., is over ; now also we have got through the great event of the day, the captain’s inspection. Write it in big letters ! Nothing is left but Divine Service, and to it we go with a sort of feeling that we should have the evening prayers.

The men are dismissed, and the boatswain’s mates pipe “rig church” on the main deck. Rigging church, gentle but ignorant shore-going reader, is accomplished as follows. Mess stools are brought from the mess decks and ranged in rows for the men to sit on ; chairs for the officers. A pulpit, supplied by Government and covered with a flag—letter “G” flag, being “white with black crosses,” answers the purpose—is placed between officers and men, generally facing the latter ; a good arrangement, which per-

mits an officer to indulge in a nap without the fear of hurting the parson's feelings. It is perhaps considered that the tired out slumbering bluejackets do that sufficiently.

The seaman schoolmaster, who acts as clerk, organist and choir master, arrives with the big Bible and Book of Common Prayer, as supplied by the Admiralty, and then superintends the placing of the last and most necessary piece of church furniture—the harmonium. Ship's corporals serve out prayer and hymn-books, and church is, so to speak, "rigged." Toll the bell! Aft come the Protestants; no shirking allowed. The Roman Catholics are fallen in forward, and one of their number gives them a short service.

As soon as the ship's company and officers are settled down, the admiral enters, with his staff, and takes his seat. Stop the bell. The schoolmaster plays a voluntary, and the chaplain ascends the

one step leading to his pulpit, or reading desk, or whatever you like to call the box provided for him.

“Breathes there a man” who can sing hymns like a bluejacket? Say, for instance, a hymn like “Eternal Father, strong to save,” or, “Onward, Christian soldiers?” The fervent tones of a Sankey, the trumpet notes of a Santley, are as nothing to the enthusiasm and noise of the British tar when he has a song he can sing; what he calls a “rousing fore-bitter” to give tongue to. His quantity of genuine religious feeling is not, as a rule, proportionate to the quantity of row he makes, though a pound of baccy finds more favour in his eyes than a religious tract. I remember a Sunday morning service in a harbour ship, I once belonged to. It was a Communion Sunday, and that special favourite of bluejackets, “My God and is Thy table spread,” was sung with the usual amount of enthusiasm. After the sermon

—they *actually* had a sermon on Communion Sundays in that ship—a lady, who had come on board to church, expressed her delight at the very good feeling and heartiness of the men. “It must be so nice for your chaplain,” she said, “to feel that so many will respond to his call and remain for the Sacrament.” I believe I sighed; I know I answered not in words. We waited, that lady and I, near the captain’s cabin, where the service was to be held. The chaplain entered, one man and two boys followed him sheepishly, and the door closed upon all that remained of that fervent congregation. I removed the lady quickly, as she struggled with indignant tears, and the remark which I understood her to make as we hurriedly retired was expressive of neither admiration or delight. Ah, these women! There’s no satisfying them. But to return to H.M. Church, *Thunderbomb*. Clarke was not like the Methodist preacher, who, observing

several of his congregation asleep, cried in a thrilling voice, “Fire! Fire!” “Where, where?” breathlessly demanded his now thoroughly aroused audience. “In the place of torment,” replied the diplomatic leader of dissent. No! Clarke had a trick worth two of that. He never gave them *time* to get fairly asleep! It was a simple plan and was bound to answer. After a sermon of such short duration that even the officers of the last night’s middle watch could not get beyond the “nodding,” the service was over. The boatswain’s mates “piped down,” and church was “unrigged.”

“Come down and have a look at the Nipper, Daintree,” said Monkton, after the flag lieutenant had seen his chief safely back to his cabin.

“I shall be delighted; I promised to have a ‘split peg’ with the bishop, so we’ll take his cabin on our way.”

His Reverence had the materials handy

—they generally were so—and was looking very hot and thirsty. After a B. and S. the three went on to the steerage. Here they found the Nipper, looking very pale from loss of blood, but lively; a crowd of youngsters, in négligé attire, were squatted about on their chests, around and underneath his hammock.

“Hulloh, Dicky, my boy! holding a levée?” said Monkton.

“Bentley says he requires a short time for *quiet meditation* before lunch, so he has kicked all his youngsters down here,” said a young gentleman who was busy marking new shirts, and had just taken off the one “in wear,” to register his name upon it.

“Quiet meditation be blowed,” muttered Cecil, but he didn’t care to growl much at the subs before the youngsters.

“I hope you are beginning to feel pretty fit again, Ormby,” said the chaplain, kindly.

“Fit as a fiddle, sir! Right as a trivet. We were just talking about Lisbon, sir. Do you think there's any chance of our running in there?”

“Ah! you're anxious to have a try at roulette, I suppose. If we do call in there, I think I must ask the doctor to consider you too seedy to go on shore. Bad place for youngsters,” and the chaplain laughed.

The youngsters laughed too. They knew jolly well that their bishop was much too good a sort to get anyone's leave stopped, though many a time he had stood them a dinner on shore, and kept a kindly eye on them afterwards.

“Are you speaking of ‘roulette,’ ” murmured Daintree, so plaintively that even our clothes marker—who was just applying a type to the tail of his shirt—looked up in surprise. “Roulette! Ah! be warned in time, innocent, unwary shipmates. I have played roulette; I have

cursed roulette. Once I thought that I *understood* the swindling game. With immense pains and prodigious labour I worked out—as I fondly believed—an infallible scheme. It's failure—for messmates, it failed—I put into verse, hoping that it might prove of use to future schemers. It runs like this:—

A GAMBLER'S SAD STORY.

Come near and listen to my tale,
Hear a poor rook'd lieutenant's wail,
Who, not content to toss and bet,
Would stake his money at roulette.

This poor lieutenant once did dwell
Within a ship ; I knew her well,
I knew him too, his heart was set
On making coin at roulette.

He had a grand, unfailing scheme,
A patent dodge by which 'twould seem
That—sure as duns come after debt—
You'd make your fortune at roulette.

He went, that poor misguided man.
He went to try his patent plan ;
His simple, easy way to get
A certain fortune at roulette.

Just twenty pounds, good English coins,
He changed for Crusades and testoons,
And, after he'd his whistle wet,
He sat him down to play roulette.

Riches galore came rolling in
Whate'er he staked, 'twas sure to win,
"By Jove !" cried he, "I never yet
Played such a grand game as roulette."

But soon a run commenced on “ Red ; ”
“ That can't last long,” our wise man said !
I'll double on the “ Black ”—they've met
A man who *understands* “ roulette.”

You've heard 'mongst other horsey tales
One about doubling horse-shoe nails ;
So, without time to think or fret,
Our friend kept doubling at roulette.

Nine, *ten* times running “ Red ” appears.
One double more ! Almost in tears
He stakes ! and prays that black as jet
May be the number at roulette.

A pause ! Black looks ! and too well *we* know
What those looks mean—the number's “ *Zero*. ”
The table wins ! Vain is regret !
A score of pounds thrown to roulette.

At 3 a.m. he goes afloat,
His messmates have to pay his boat.
Two morals from this tale we get ;
Don't try to scheme ; don't play roulette.

“ Yes, that's all very well,” said Monkton, as Daintree, quite worn out with his tale of wrong, leant sadly against Dicky's hammock. “ Your advice is excellent, but your ruined gambling friend was a fool. He appears to have thrown up his original scheme—provided he ever really had one—and simply gone on doubling on one of the colours, which as everyone knows is madness. A long run against you is sure to come

sooner or later, and your doubles then get so enormous that you're a bankrupt in no time."

" Ah ! but he--or perhaps I had better at once say *I*, for of course you will have guessed that *I* was the victim, the result of whose misplaced confidence has just been confided to you in thrilling verse. Well, *I* had an unfailing scheme. I forget the details now, but it was a grand conception. That's where the moral comes in. Futile is man's greatest effort." Here Daintree grew plaintive again, causing the hero of the shirt-tails to once more pause in his interesting labour, and listen attentively. " Vain are our noblest devices. We heap up riches on the roulette board, knowing full well that the rascally croupier will rake them in. We cast our coin on a good green ground, yet it brings forth nothing but I.O.U.'s and general insolvency. My patent scheme,

like most other fellow's, never came off: I was tempted by what seemed a certainty in doubling, and you know the result. Debt and beggary, crime and prison. Worse crimes, more prison, hangman's knot, convict's death, and — blazes." And the flag-lieutenant sighed and looked miserable.

"Well, we'll say no more about it. 'Roulette' seems to be one of your numerous sore subjects. Touching the Portuguese ladies now, whose land we are passing; have you no poetry for them?" and Cecil bestowed a knowing wink upon the chaplain.

"Gracious heavens! Poetry! But it is no use, you scoundrel; you won't get a rise out of me. I know your tricky little games."

"No, no," said the chaplain; "no humbug. I really should be glad to hear the opinion of such a well-known connoisseur regarding the Lisbon ladies.

I've never seen them, but suppose them to be pretty and nice."

"Ah ! The church ! the church ! you're all the same. Bishop and curate; country parson and naval chaplain ; you all feel a tender interest in the fair sex."

"That's all very well; but what do you fellows think ? I say that the most sporting of country parsons, as also the most lawn-tennis playing of young and much be-slipped curates, would be obliged to confess that his feelings were rough and *hard* compared to those of our soft-hearted Francis.

A general laugh at Daintree's expense, in which he was one of the first to join, followed, and then the chaplain continued, "But we are forgetting our subject. Now, as regards the ladies of ——"

"At it again !" interrupted Daintree, bursting into song. "At it again, at it again, you naughty old bishop ; you're at it again."

Clarke submitted resignedly to the interruption, but would not drop the ladies.

“ Well, Daintree,” said he, “ satisfy my —*our* curiosity. They *are* pretty and nice? Eh ? ”

“ Pretty! nice! ” exclaimed Daintree, in tones of intense pity. “ Ye goddesses, hear him! Wrap me in flannel; rock me to sleep; put me in my little cot; rock me in the cradle of the deep. Oh Lord! They may be nice. Yes, certainly, they *may* be nice. I have had no opportunity of judging. Their peculiar style of beauty was such that I had no desire to discover more perfection at closer quarters. Up to about fifteen or sixteen they look rather slim, fetching little fillies; but after that, the Deluge; in the shape of fat, coarseness, and moustaches. So much for their prettiness! They probably have some good points; or their husbands, who are good-looking fellows enough, would hardly even *pretend* to be faithful. One must allow, for in-

stance, that they can use their fans well, almost as well as the Spanish women, though for a different purpose. Portuguese ladies use them to hide their ugly faces; Spanish ladies, to render yet more attractive their handsome ones. But just fancy being tied for life to an ever-increasing mass! Why, cruelty and desertion would be justifiable."

"Hear, hear!" said Bentley, who now joined the party with the rest of the "quiet meditators." "It's quite refreshing to find you justifying occasional desertion of the fair sex. Feeling better, Ormby? Considering your dangerous wound, and the fuss you made about it, I expected to find you pretty nearly a corpse by this time."

"If I'd had my way there would have been a deal more fuss made about it," growled Cecil, hauling viciously at his beard.

"Ha, ha! There spoke the middies'

friend ; the middies' champion," sneered Bentley—but not too loudly—as he turned away.

"We must be off to luncheon," said the Parson, quickly. "Good-bye, Ormby ; take care of yourself, boy."

So Sunday afternoon passed slowly by, with plenty of novels, smoke, and sleep.

At 5 p.m. the chaplain held a short service, attendance at which was voluntary and—scanty. And all who could turned in early.

CHAPTER VII.

“ **T**EN minutes to four, sir. Shall I give you a light?”

The midshipman of the middle watch, looking tired but cheery as the end of his night’s work so nearly approaches, proceeds to light Monkton’s candles, and to inform their gradually awakening proprietor that there has been a lot of rain lately, but that it has nearly stopped now.

“ Thank goodness,” said Cecil, sitting up to look anxiously through his port. “ I hope we are not going to have any more of it. Looks uncommonly black still. Reminds me of James Pigg’s reply to old Jorrocks, when the latter asked him at about 2 a.m., and after many

drinks, what sort of night it was; and Mr. Pigg, carefully putting his head into the cupboard instead of out of the window, expressed his opinion that it was 'Hellish dark, and smells of cheese.'"

Out tumbles Cecil, and prepares to go on deck at 4 o'clock to take charge of the morning watch, and the midshipman who has called him moves off to take a tender interest in the movements of his own relief.

It is Wednesday morning, and the fleet is rolling home through the Bay of Biscay, having steamed past the mouth of the Tagus without running in for Lisbon. The weather is still warm, and the officers go on deck in the early morning with bare feet, as water is being, or about to be, dashed about in all directions, cleaning ship.

"Gangway, there! Look up, Jim," says Jack, as an officer in pretty, pretty shoes and socks comes picking his way

along, trying to get as little wet as possible. Too late! Round goes Jim, over goes the bucket, and the patent leathers have joined the old clo' majority, gone to their last long account, still un-holely, and—oh! horrid thought—unpaid for. And the moral of this little digression is, “There’s nothing like leather,” *except* “Bare feet,” to which might be added, “Take care of the leathers and socks, and the feet will take care of themselves;” also—but never mind.

I did not go to my cabin, put the slop-pail on the bed, and the solitary chair outside the door, in order to have room to open a drawer, and, after making all these necessary arrangements, take therefrom a slip of paper, merely to jot down a few “new and moral” headings for copy books. I say I had no intention of doing this thing, and yet here I am rushing into proverbs. Bear with

me, young ladies ; I apologise to you especially. Do not be angry, but if your feelings *should* prompt you to indulge in strong language, pardon me if I remind you of that wholesome lesson you copied out one hundred times yesterday by command of Miss Yellowly—“I must not say *bother* ; it is a *naughty* word.”

But to return to the wet decks. Oh, no ; we have wandered away from them for so long that we may reasonably suppose them to have had time to dry. To return to the dry decks then. Blue-jackets are now clustered about them under the command of their petty officers, cleaning wood and bright work, *à la* opening scene in “H.M.S. Pinafore.” One feels—that is, one *would* feel if “Pinafore” had been invented—inclined to greet them as Captain Corcoran does in his now famous recitative, “My gallant crew, good morning.” But it won’t do. This is real life, this is. Picture to yourself

—perhaps you have a vivid imagination —picture to yourself the intense astonishment of the honest *Thunderbombs*. They could hardly be more surprised to find on running aloft to reef topsails that “Lemonade and ginger-pop, stood handily in every top,” as in the gallant “Mantelpiece.”

“Now then, you Davis, I’ll catch you one behind the lug, if you don’t get on with that belayin’ pin a bit smarter,” said the captain of the main-top to a boy who was nodding drowsily over his special piece of bright work.

“I’m awfully hungry; why can’t they give a feller a pint o’ cocoa wen he turns, out? What feller can work on a empty stummick?” grumbled an ordinary seaman, standing near.

“The Queen’s Regulations would ‘ardly bear them out, I’m thinking,” said a seaman gunner; “although, of course, it’s at the hoption of the captain.”

“ Hold your slack jor ; and you, boy, collect the cleaning rags. They’ll pipe to breakfast in a minute or two ; it’s pretty nigh six bells. As for you darned seamen gunners, or Sea Lawyers, as I calls yer, wot with yer Queen’s Reg’lations and learned jor, there arn’t no manner o’ use a’ tryin’ to get in a word edgewise ! ” and the captain of the main top, a hard-palmed, horn-soled tar, one of the olden time, looked with unutterable contempt at the bluejackets of the board and training ship “ school.” The latter gentlemen, however, merely laughed, and a gunner’s mate, who was passing, didn’t improve the Captain’s temper by remarking, “ Hullo, Jim, they’re a taking you out for a walk again, are they ? ”

“ I see by last week’s *United Service Gazette*,” said Mr. Seaman Gunner Jenkins, “ that admirals and some captains will very likely be allowed to have their women folk to live with them aboard before long, like they did in the old days.”

“ You’ll be wantin’ your lady wife to share yer home with yer next, I s’pose? If Lady Jenkins ain’t no bigger nor’er man, one ’ammick won’t be anything too small for the pair of ’ee.”

With which parting shot, the captain of the main top walked off, followed by his top-mates, and Jenkins might have been heard to mutter, as the boatswain’s mates piped to breakfast, “ I’ll have my rights, whether I live in an ’ammock or a hadmiral’s cabin.”

We will not follow the men down to the main deck, for, although a bluejacket does not eat like a pig or a German, he does not *say* much as he appeases his hunger.

Talking of Germans feeding, I met a man in Bombay a short time ago, who had been in Strasbourg during the Siege, and had also been through a great part of the Franco-German war. His description of German military officers’ greediness—officers

of high rank too—was startling. At Table d' Hôte they had no idea of allowing a lady to be helped first. They would cut out the centre of a chop or small pie and pass on the remainder to their wives ; and after polishing off half-a-dozen made dishes, each of which represented a separate course, but which only served them for a mouthful, they would order an enormous bowl of bread and milk, and look hungry enough to commence their meal again.

Perhaps these were only the little eccentricities of war time. I think—and mention it with all humility—that a lot of West Indian niggers squatted around a bowl of “Banana squash” is a less objectionable sort of feed.

* * * *

“Oh, hang this practical navigation sheet ! I say, sir, just add up these distances, there's a good fellow. You don't seem to have anything particular to do, and I can't get the right latitude and longitude. The

ship's position, according to me, is on the top of Ushant Lighthouse."

"Your manner of speaking is not respectful, Mr. Ormby. You will oblige me to report you to the commander. Ever since 10 o'clock you have been wasting your time," and the naval instructor, a mild little man just caught, and totally inexperienced in midshipmen, tried to come the severe pedagogue, as he presided over the young gentleman's studies, in the Admiral's fore cabin.

"Mr. Barter," said a senior midshipman, who, lolling in one of the Admiral's arm-chairs, was reading a "yellow back," "will you oblige me by being a trifle less noisy; I scarcely feel equal to noise of any sort."

"The slightest row distracts my attention, and renders me quite incapable of prosecuting my studies," chimed in another and even more hairy-faced middy, who was playing at "noughts and crosses" with an

acting sub, and cursing the service audibly the while.

“Really, this is too much,” broke out the tormented Barter; “I cannot allow myself to——”

“The commander wants Mr. Ravensworth, sir, and the officer of the watch wishes Mr. Ormby and Mr. Hill to attend the 11 o'clock watch drill.” A ship's corporal gives the message and retires.

“Hurrah! No more ‘*x*’ chasing for me to-day,” said Ravensworth, as soon as his next door neighbour had dug him sufficiently hard in the ribs to arouse him from his slumbers and make him understand that he was wanted. “I'm afraid,” he continued, with assumed concern, “that my business with the commander will prevent my returning to finish that ‘Double altitude,’ sir. It's very annoying, *most* annoying; but duty calls, and I must away. Good-bye, you fellows.” And rolling carefully against the arms of two youngsters, who

really were hard at work at trigonometry, and closing the Slug's work book *en passant*, Mr. Ravensworth departed, to receive a slanging from the commander for some trifling neglect of duty, and then to retire to the gun-room and do a quiet sleep for the remainder of study time.

“Once for all, gentlemen,” commenced the naval instructor.

“Hee-ah ! hee-ah !” said Dicky, who, with Hill, was preparing to move off.

“Once for all, gentlemen,” again began Mr. Barter.

“Put one and one together, and we have *twice* for all,” said the man with the yellow back: “now let us place two and two together, and see what we obtain, sir. Really your lecture promises to become most interesting ;” and he sank deeper into the arm chair.

“I'll stand this impertinence no longer,” and snatching up one of the captain's caps, which an ingenuous youth had substituted

for his own, the naval instructor, boiling over with indignation, rushed out of the cabin.

“I move that this academy be closed for long vacation,” said Dicky. “I’m afraid we’ve rather overdone it this time. There’ll be a devil of a row, and we may as well score one holiday. The reckoning on the other side bids fair to be heavy.”

Luckily for the young gentlemen, Monkton was just coming up from the wardroom as Barter left the cabin, and he saw at once that that mild, much be-sat upon man was on strike.

“Halloh, old boy ! Where away ? Stop a minute ; I’ll race you !” he said.

“No, no ; don’t keep me ; I can’t stop,” said Barter, trying to push his way down the ladder. “I can’t stand it any longer,” he gasped. “They shall all be reported !”

“Oh, don’t do that. Listen to me. Let this soothe your savage breast :

What fates impose, that man must needs abide,
It boots not to resist both wind and tide.

“There, what do you think of that? I don’t quite agree with Edward IV.’s sentiments as arranged by Shakespeare, but then, see what a lot of trouble it saves.”

“I don’t care ; they make a perfect fool of me.”

“Well, at any rate, put your own cap on,” cried Cecil, quoting softly, as the irate little man tore himself away, “God made him a fool ; let him take the place of a fool. Those young idiots have let themselves in this time.”

However, the short delay he had caused did good service. A mallet had fallen—possibly by accident, probably because one of the men had thrown it---out of the mizen top, suspiciously near the commander’s head as he walked the poop ! and Barter, not finding him below, had just returned to the upper deck when his voice was heard shouting, “Clear the mizen top ! Where’s the master-at-arms ? Ship’s cor-

poral! Send them here. By God, I'll teach them! And, what do you want, sir?" he said, turning fiercely on Barter, who had been fool enough to approach him. "You are a witness that the damned blackguards are trying to murder me?"

"No, sir;" Barter edged away to the very brink of the poop. "I was not on deck until just this minute. I couldn't swear to anything, sir."

"Who the devil wishes you to swear? What do you want? Why, in the name of all that's damnable, do you stand there like the mummy of a rotten Capuchin friar? I believe you're an accomplice of those mizen top murderers! An accessory before the fact, By God I do!" And the commander, looking like a demon, made a grab at Barter's coat.

Without a sound, without a word, good, bad or indifferent, the naval instructor turned and fled, nor paused until his cabin was reached, the door shut and barricaded.

Then he sat him down, sighed faintly, and spent the remainder of the day in concocting a letter of complaint to the captain. He was a perfect whale at letter writing, but his complaints never reached farther than the commander, who told him not to be a fool, and threw them overboard.

In the meantime, all the men who had been working in the mizen top were fallen in on the quarter-deck, and the commander was trying hard to find out who had dropped (?) the mallet.

No good. The men knew that the commander guessed it had been done on purpose, and that the culprit, if caught, would be punished severely. Nothing could be found out, and Scott had to content himself with stopping their leave for a month for general carelessness.

“I thawt you said you could make sartin’ o ’itting him !” said one of the men as they rolled forward.

“Yes, so I did, dang it all. I thawt I

could. Thicky mallet 'ood a cawt 'un a rare foine skat 'pon top o' the nut, th' owd blay-gaird." Tregarth laughed aloud as he spoke; too much aloud, for the commander heard him, and, delighted to have some one to come down upon, called after him loudly, "Come back there—that man who laughed. Master-at-arms, you heard him! Put him in irons for insubordination. You'll laugh at me, will you, you miserable West country chaw-bacon. I'll teach you! Take him below!"

"Beg pardon, sir, yer honour. Ef you'd koindly—"

"Take him below," shrieked Scott. "Do you hear me? Take him below. *D——n me, he's mutinous!*"

Tregarth was marched off, and Commander Scott seemed happy again. A few minutes later, Captain Le Hunte came out of his cabin and joined the commander. "What's been the matter, Scott?" he asked.

"That insolent scoundrel, Tregarth, sir;

he gets more insubordinate every day. I must ask you to deal with him to-morrow."

"Ah! Tregarth was it? I fancied he was rather a willing, hard working man. By the bye, Scott, the admiral and myself would be glad if you could carry out your duty without the aid of such strong language. It is quite unnecessary, and, pardon me if I suggest to you, that as the men are unable to retaliate, and very often to even *object*, it looks like hitting a man after he's down, letting rip a whole broadside into a vessel after she's struck. Scarcely seamanlike, Eh, Scott?" The captain laughed pleasantly, but the commander was up in arms at once.

"Very good, sir," said he, suddenly; "very good; I am much obliged to you and the admiral for teaching me my duty, and for accusing me of cowardice, for that's what you are doing."

"Quite sufficient, Captain Scott," said the skipper, quietly. "It is the duty of both

the admiral and myself to see that you do yours properly. All executive officers will attend on deck this afternoon between 1.30 and 3 o'clock. The admiral intends to exercise the fleet at steam tactics."

"Very good, sir. Excuse me, it must be near lunch-time;" and the commander went down to the ward-room, his temper by no means improved by the captain's reproof.

"Too late, I'm afraid, to do much good," thought the latter; "but it may have some effect. I wouldn't have that man's temper for—"

"One penny. I offer one penny for the officer's thoughts. Any advance on one penny. Come along sir, or I shall attack the secretary. I am awfully peckish." And Daintree's head disappeared, as it had arisen, through the admiral's skylight. "Why didn't you fellows begin?" said the captain, as he entered the cabin and found

Blaxon, the secretary, and Daintree sitting opposite each other, disconsolately.

“Well, we’ve had a slight argument about saying grace,” laughed Blaxon. “I’m not much in favour of grace at any time, and never even heard of it before luncheon. However, as Daintree said he liked it, I asked him to oblige accordingly, and then he discovered that his conscience wouldn’t allow him, as the mutton looked tough and the beef tougher. Under these distressingly religious circumstances we decided upon waiting for either the admiral or yourself to put in an appearance.”

“What humbugs you are,” laughed the skipper. “It’s evident that neither of you are particularly hungry. What do you think, admiral?” he continued, as Sir Robert came in from one of his sleeping cabins.

“I’m hungry enough, I know that; I always am at sea,” replied the admiral. “What day of the month is it, Blaxon?”

“The twentieth of August, sir.”

“By Jove! we may be paid off by the 1st of September, after all,” exclaimed Daintree. “Monkton and I are hoping to have a shy at the partridges together, this year.”

“Twentieth of August, eh?” said Sir Robert musingly. “This very day, never mind how many years ago, a curious thing happened to me.”

The others just looked up to show that they were ready for the yarn which they knew they were in for directly the admiral asked the day of the month ; and Sir Robert required no further questioning.

“I was the lieutenant commanding the *Bruiser* gun-boat,” he said, “and at the time I refer to we were on the West Coast of Africa station, and lying off a small village as far up the old Calabar as our ships ever go. It was a Sunday afternoon, and we had all slung our grass hammocks, and made preparations for sleeping until

the heat of the day was over. I was just in the midst of a dreamland rehearsal of a meeting with one who—What are you grinning at, Mr. Francis? I was *young* then. Not young enough to get spoony on a girl because she had a pretty face, nor stupid enough to *dote* on her for *anything*; but still I was young, and could dream spoony dreams. I thought then, with Christopher Sly, ‘Let the world slip, we shall ne’er be younger.’ But, as I was saying, I was dreaming of one who is now my wife—some of us can be faithful even as lieutenants, Mr. Jackanapes—when I became conscious of a violent shaking at my hammock, and the boatswain, in much excitement, blurted out, ‘What’s to be done with ’er, sir! She’ll slip her cable altogether if something ain’t done quickly!’ ‘Slip her cable,’ said I, ‘What do you mean? Is she dragging, or what?’ I thought of course that the *she* referred to was the ship. ‘Oh, I ain’t allooding to the

old *Bruiser*, sir ; she's right enough—only damned old—it's this here gal ! She looks awful bad ; can't be older than my Nan neither.' 'What girl ? Whose girl ?' said I, springing out. We didn't get many female visitors up the old Calabar, and I was in the gangway in half a minute. There I found—leaning against the main hatchway, naked and fainting, almost a skeleton, and with feet and legs torn and bleeding—a black girl, of certainly not more than sixteen years—a most piteous object. 'Have you sent for the doctor ?' asked I. 'Yes, sir, here he comes,' and our doctor—poor old Donovan, who we buried a couple of months afterwards at Sierra Leone, as kind-hearted a fellow as the fever ever carried off—came rushing up. We had the girl taken down to my spare sleeping cabin, and poor old Don soon put her to rights. That evening I sent to the village for a native, who, after questioning her, gave us the following

story: About a fortnight before she had escaped from a village a couple of hundred miles inland, and had travelled the whole distance down on foot. She knew something of the old Calabar river, and had a sort of vague notion that if she could once reach it and get into a ship, she would be safe. And now, what think you was the cause of all this?"

"Give it up," said Daintree; "wanted change of air, maybe."

"Tired of her husband?" suggested Blaxon.

Sir Robert continued with the faintest smile, "you are both right; she *did* want change. I have no doubt she *was* tired of her husband. The poor young woman had been married about a year before to one of the native chiefs, and something like a week previous to her escape had given birth to twins. Nothing so very strange in that, Eh, Le Hunte?" The captain was the proud father of twin girls. "How-

ever, it was the custom then, very probably is so still, for our black brethren of the Cameroons to consider that any woman who bore twins was indebted to the arch fiend himself for their production, and so the unfortunate mother and her olive branches——”

“Call them tar brushes, sir; please call them tar brushes. *We* are olive branches,” murmured Daintree, plaintively.

“Very well; *tar brushes*, if you like. I wish you would not interrupt me. Where was I? Ah, yes! The unfortunate mother and her twin tar brushes were always burnt to death. This wretched young woman and her offspring were, of course, condemned; but the arch fiend having on this occasion taken a fancy to a *Chief's* wife, extensive preparations were necessary, and a couple of days before the intended sacrifice, the principal victim managed to escape, carrying with her her boy. The other child had died shortly

after birth. Passing through innumerable perils, she had at length succeeded in reaching the river ; but *alone*, for her baby had wasted away, and died during the journey. We had great difficulty in persuading her to eat and drink, and the poor girl grew more melancholy daily. She believed the Great Spirit would never forgive her heinous crime ; for as such she looked upon her escape. She evidently thought it right and proper that she should be sacrificed, and personally would have been a willing victim, but the mother's love for her first-born had been too strong, and for the sake of her little one she had, as she thought, sinned. Now that the child, the cause of her wickedness, (?) was dead, she seemed perfectly miserable and hopeless. Well, I must hurry over the remainder ; there are some things one must tell quickly. About ten days after her arrival on board, we steamed down the old Calabar, 'Homeward bound,' a glorious night ; the water like a mill pond.

I was smoking a last cigar on the upper deck, when I heard a splash astern. The boatswain, who was standing right aft, sang out, 'Man overboard,' and we had the engines stopped and life-boat away in no time. The boatswain went in the boat, and I rushed down to the spare cabin, as I feared the poor child, wife, mother, was gone. The clothes we had given her were placed carefully on the bed. I then looked in my cabin ; my dumb-bells, which should have been on the dressing table, were nowhere to be seen, but in the place where they usually lay, I found her bracelets and anklets, and upon the cabin bulk-heading behind them was traced, probably by her finger nail, a rough representation of a heart pierced by an assegai. She must have tied the dumb-bells to herself to insure sinking quickly, and then thrown herself out of the stern port. The life-boat returned, the men having seen nothing of our poor little female passenger, and on we sailed for

‘England, home, and beauty.’ She was black, and not too good-looking, but, God knows, a woman more thoroughly forlorn, more thoroughly deserving of one’s compassion, never put an end to herself. Her’s is the only dusky one, amongst the faces of all the old friends and companions who have passed away, that I can still in fancy recall.” Sir Robert ended thoughtfully and sadly.

“ Well, it strikes me, sir, that you were well rid of her,” said Blaxton. “ What on earth could you have done with her?”

“ I intended to get her some employment at Cape Coast Castle.”

“ Where she’d have turned washerwoman, become a converted black, and stolen her unsuspecting white brothers’ newest shirts. I know them, and still think that you were well rid of her.”

“ I am sorry that I cannot agree with you,” said the admiral, stiffly. Daintree arose and went on deck, returning in a few

minutes to report to the admiral that it was one o'clock.

“Very well; come, Le Hunte,” and Sir Robert and the captain went on the poop.

The commander, officer of the watch, and staff commander were on the poop on duty, and the remaining executive officers were also assembled to witness the tactics.

The fleet was now formed in two columns in line ahead, close order, and each ship had sufficient steam to enable her to proceed at eight knots if necessary.

“Even money I name the first evolution,” said Dare, who, with Spencer, Monkton and Garton, was standing near the chart house.

“That's a very sporting offer of yours,” said the Captain of Marines. “What do you say, Cecil, shall we take him up?”

“Yes; I'm with you to the extent of one day's pay.”

“Well, we'll say an even sov. then, Dare. Now, what do you name?”

“I’ll put my money on ‘form columns of divisions in line abreast.’”

The admiral and captain, who had been talking together on the starboard side, were now joined by the flag lieutenant, and after a little more conversation, the latter turned and gave an order to the chief signalman. In another minute up went the signal flags for the first evolution, rolled up and secured with a slip hitch, which could be slipped directly the flags were hoisted high enough.

“Hullo ! What’s that ?” said Spencer, as the flags blew out clear. “Eh, Dare, you’ve lost ; that certainly isn’t ‘divisions in line abreast.’ Each lieutenant consulted his manual of flag evolutions to find the meaning of the flags, and it was found to be “form columns of sub-divisions in line abreast.”

“Only a difference of three letters in the reading of the signal, but a good deal of difference in the evolution,” said Cecil.

“And a good deal of difference in the coin,” laughed Garton.

“We'll trouble you for one couter, Dare.”

“Right you are, Capting!” said Dare.

“And, Dare, we'll stand you a cheap drink when we go below,” laughed Cecil.

“Mr. Monkton!” said the commander, who hearing a laugh, immediately imagined that it must be at him. “Ah, Mr. Monkton, if it is absolutely necessary for you officers to keep up an incessant conversation and yells of laughter, perhaps you will kindly go farther aft; at any rate, as long as the Fleet is being exercised.” With a malicious grin he turned away, and our friends smiling at his petty spitefulness, walked to the taffrail.

“It is possible for such big swells as lieutenants to get sat upon occasionally,” sneered Bentley, loud enough for them to hear, and to cause Monkton to utter a distinct curse. “Who can expect us to be respected by the youngsters when the

commander speaks to us like that before everyone?" said Dare, and the others thought, "Ah! who?"

Form "single column in line abreast," "single column in line ahead," "column or columns in quarter line," were the manœuvres which now followed rapidly, and with the usual number of close shaves. It is difficult for a landsman to realize, unless he has actually witnessed them from a man-of-war engaged, the nerve, skill, and quickness of eye and brain required by officers conducting the movements of the different ships during steam tactics. In altering formation, these enormous and often unwieldy ironclads have to pass each other quite close, at a speed of 15 or 16 knots an hour, taking up certain positions at the same time. The signals made and answered, the evolution is at once commenced, and the distance, steering qualities, and speed of the ship herself, and also of her companions, have

to be considered by the officers in command, and his orders given without a moment's delay. The slightest irresolution or loss of nerve, on making a necessarily close shave, resulting almost certainly in a collision.

“Ah! I was expecting that,” said Rue, who, with Dicky Ormby, was standing on the fore bridge. That means ‘Fleet will manœuvre in groups.’”

“Why we haven’t formed groups at all this cruise,” said the Nipper. “I have rather a hazy notion of how it’s done.”

We will not follow the “groups” through any of their intricate manœuvres, neither will we record the numerous signals made from the flag ships to the different vessels under their command to “keep station,” “observe bearings and distances,” “close on the admiral,” &c., &c. It will be enough for us to know that at three o’clock the admiral made the fleet resume its original formation, and the last day of steam tactics

was over, for "Ushant" was a hundred miles astern, and Spithead would be reached by the Portsmouth Division to-morrow (Thursday) morning.

At four o'clock the four Plymouth ships were ordered to proceed to their own port, and they accordingly steamed off, under the command of Lord William Parker in the *Agincourt*.

The Portsmouth ships were then formed into two divisions, and, sticking to our old shipmates in the *Thunderbomb* we will keep on our course with them.



CHAPTER VIII.

“ For just one year we’ve been away,
 Or nigh.
I seemed to hear but yesterday
 That sigh ;
As I to Portsmouth town did say,
 Good bye,
You nasty, dirty sea-port town,
 Good bye.
Tears, copious tears, more monstrous far
Than pearls, filled that partic’lar star,
 My eye.
Like hot, salt rocks, those tears that filled
 My eye.
To Southsea pier, and skating rink,
 And band,
To Southsea Common, where you sink
 In sand,
The beach where Polly waved, I think,
 Her hand,
If ’twas not Poll, ’twas Kate who waved
 Her hand ;
To girls dressed in the last inventions,
To mothers who will your intentions
 Demand,
You have not long to wait for that
 Demand ;
To Portsmouth Hard and dockyard, too,
 Ta, ta.
Burn Griffin’s little notes in blue,
 Ha, ha !
Emanuel, Moses, Levi, Jew,
 Ah ! bah !
You sometime, late, and present Jew,
 Ah ! bah !

Then off to Gosport, hardest task,
Farewell to Maude, who longs to ask
Mamma;
She hinted, would *I* like to ask
Mamma.
And now to all these scenes come back,
Less rash;
I'd best give Poll and Kate the sack,—
No cash.
Poor, flighty Maude has come, alack,
To smash;
Yes, speaking mildly, she has come
To smash.
To stop on board were wisest, *but*
It's nice on Southsea pier to cut
A dash;
With Kate upon the pier to cut
A dash."

"Bravo, Daintree!" said Dare, who had been listening amusedly to the flag lieutenant's murmured verses. "That's an odd piece of poetry of yours."

"Why, you don't mean to say that I was composing aloud?" said Daintree, in the greatest apparent surprise. "Yes," he continued, mournfully; "it's an odd poem; my own peculiar style; the result of my own unsettled condition. I wish I could make up my mind to keep clear of society. It's all vanity and vexation. Your morning watch, eh?"

Dare nodded. It *was* his morning watch, and “what are you doing up so early, most erratic of flag lieutenants? It's not seven o'clock yet.”

“Couldn't sleep. The excitement of returning to old England, of seeing once more our native shores, the land of our birth, was too much for me. I grew restless, and came on deck to shake it off by a good brisk walk.”

“You awful humbug,” said Dare; “why I saw you, myself, slope languishly up the hatchway, and go straight to the poop rails, where you have been leaning ever since.”

“Is that so? Ah! well! I confess to having altered my mind about the brisk walk. Didn't feel up to it, you know, after a sleepless night,” murmured Daintree.

“And as for your excited and restless state of mind, it probably wouldn't take long to alter that. Why, man, you

look about as excitable as an old Arab, and as restless as a marble statue.” Daintree smiled deprecatingly, and muttered in resigned tones ;

“ Class 1.—Facetious ; ” and Dare, after an ineffectual attempt to make him walk up and down, left him still endeavouring to decide on giving up society, and looking, as Dare afterwards said, about as cheerful as a wet sparrow.

Still undecided, Daintree, after another quarter of an hour’s cogitation, went below to finish dressing.

Sail had been made in the morning watch, and the fleet was now rattling along at nearly ten knots an hour, a great speed for ironclads, towards Spithead.

At eight o’clock, Steele, the staff commander, laid off the ship’s position on the chart, and found that they were twenty-eight miles from the anchorage. The admiral wished to get in and have

the ships moored by half-past eleven, and Steele considered that they should be able to do that easily.

“Then we will shorten and furl sails after ‘Divisions,’ and give ourselves plenty of time to look shipshape when we arrive. Will you see to that, Le Hunte?” said Sir Robert, who was as gay as a sand-boy.

“Aye, aye, sir!” said the captain, also all smiles; for the mother of *the* twins was already at Portsmouth.

After the chaplain had read prayers, Commander Scott ordered, “Pipe hands shorten and furl sail.”

The signal was made to the other ships, and as the piercing pipes and hoarse voices of the boatswain’s mates rang along the decks, the men rushed to their stations without word or noise of any sort.

“Midshipmen of the tops, aloft!” Up scrambled all the youngsters who had

command of the different tops ; Dicky Ormby and Hill making for the main.

Precious quick they have to be, too, for they have not run over many rat-lines before, “Upper yard men, in the tops!” is ordered, and the upper yard men, generally the smartest men in the ship, come tearing up after them, and woe betide the luckless middy who is unable to *run* the rigging, for in about ten seconds he will be caught up and trampled upon by the bluejackets, who, of course, stop for nobody.

“Masthead!—Haul taut!” shouts the commander ; “then shorten sail!” Each order being accompanied by the shrill *pipes*.

Sails are lowered and clewed up. “Furl sails! Way aloft!” and now all the remaining sail furlers move smartly up, and the sails are furled, and yards squared.

“Smith, jump up on the royal yard,” said the Nipper, hailing a man from the

main top. “There’s a dead man—(*i.e.* rope’s-end)—hanging down the port side; pick it up!”

“Aye, aye, sir!” said Smith, the leading hand on the cross-trees, as he ran up the Jacob’s ladder.

Another minute, and a peculiar rustle is heard in the topmast rigging. Smith, in jumping from the Jack to the foot-rope of the royal yard, has lost his hold. “Stand from under!” yell several blue-jackets on the topsail yard; “Stand from under!”

Dicky looks up, hardly knowing what to expect. The *Thunderbomb* is his first sea-going ship. He looks up and sees what he at first takes to be a bundle of clothes strike and then rebound from the rigging just above him; then a human body—it is distinct enough now!—with outstretched arms and legs, tightly clenched hands, and livid, deathlike face, passes quickly by him, head downwards. He

shrinks back close to the mast, clutching wildly at the rigging ; and then waits, rooted to the spot ; feeling himself grow pale as that wretched face, which he barely caught a glimpse of, but the awful expression of which will be remembered by him many a time as he climbs to his station in the maintop ; waits, in the sudden stillness which has followed that well-known—"Stand from under!" waits, as all do who have heard it, for that next too well-known sound—the sound of a human body striking the deck ; the sound that tells of sudden death, or, worse still, of a fellow-creature's *prolonged* agony.

It is but a few seconds that he has to wait, after all ; but a few seconds, which might be minutes ! hours ! as he shrinks still closer to the rigging, unable to speak, unable even to *think*.

Remember, this was his first experience of bluejackets' many accidents ; often since then he has heard the well-known cry,

has waited for the well-known sound! At last it comes! The strain is over, his hands relax their clutch, his mouth closes, his blood leaps warmly on again. Some, perhaps many, have not felt it, have not cared a rap, that the last few seconds—and *such* seconds!—have been all the allowance made their shipmate to prepare for and sail on his last long cruise.

“That’ll knock a few bones into his stummick,” said a leading seaman, with a choice oath, as he stood looking carelessly over the edge of the maintop.

“Silence!” gasped Dicky. “How dare you!” He had not recovered sufficiently to say more than that, but the captain of the top, our old friend, he of the older school, catching the man a blow on the side of the head which sent his cap flying overboard, and nearly knocked the owner after it, said, gruffly, with a half apologetic look at Dicky, “Darn ye! ye long-gutted

skunk ; I'll break every bone in your carcass for ye!" and an approving murmur from the surrounding topmen showed that they thoroughly appreciated their gallant captain's feelings.

That leading seaman, the smartest man aloft, in the ship, but thoroughly reckless and—like many another bluejacket—caring for neither God or man, has since then met with the same fate as the unfortunate Smith.

Smith's body—the poor fellow had died immediately after reaching the deck!—was taken below, and orders were given and work carried on as if nothing out of the common had happened. Indeed, nothing out of the common had happened.

The "Nab" light vessel had been passed shortly after ten o'clock, and now at a quarter to eleven, the fleet, "in single column," was passing the "Warner." Officers and men were looking out for friends and relations in the yachts and

boats which had come out of the harbour directly the fleet was reported in sight.

“By Jove! there’s the old governor!” said Monkton, as a large schooner yacht passed close under the stern.

“And the Uncle and Vi!” chimed in the Nipper, as they both commenced waving their caps, and were quickly answered from the yacht.

“Who is the old party with the eye-glass, Cecil?”

“Oh, he’s a conceited old boy; a Colonel Smith, of the 120th, one of the most magnificently ugly men I know. I fancy the governor and Master are staying with him.”

“What’s he got to be conceited about?” said the inquiring Nipper.

“Goodness knows! Perhaps, because his name’s Smith, or because his mother’s name was Jones, or his wife’s Robinson. Perhaps because he’s five feet three inches in his boots: *possibly* because he’s Colonel of a line regiment!”

“Don’t be nasty, Cecil. I daresay he’s a good sort, or your people wouldn’t be staying with him. I suppose that’s his wife, that ancient old ‘cup o’ tea,’ with the sallow complexion. The 120th have been a good long time in India, I’ll bet my life.”

“Don’t be nasty, you sarcastic little wretch. I daresay she’s young, and pretty, and altogether charming, or your people wouldn’t be in a yacht with her, you know,” and Cecil laughed. But Dicky wouldn’t see the joke.

“There’s Vi kissing her hand now,” he cried. “Kiss yours, or wave your hand-kerchief, or do something, Cecil. I can’t put down my glass.”

Cecil kissed his hand promptly.

The fleet proceeded, rather more slowly now, towards Spithead, the schooner keeping close on the *Thunderbomb’s* quarter. By half-past eleven the ships had taken up their respective billets, and were lying

quietly moored at Spithead. Then out went the accommodation ladders, and all the officers, whose people had come out of the harbour, crowded to the gangways to receive them. Cecil and Dicky were well to the front, and the first to come on board, followed closely by Mr. Monkton, was Violet Ormby. She looked a little confused as she stepped on the upper deck and saw the small crowd of officers, but it was only for a moment, for the Nipper darted forward and caught her round the waist.

“By Jove, eh!” he cried, “who’d have thought it? Why, you’ve grown quite a woman!” and he kissed her a dozen-times, to the intense delight of the old ’Ral, who was watching the meeting from the poop, his wife having gone to the commander-in-chief’s to wait for him quietly.

“Nice bright-looking girl that, Daintree. Good boy, young Ormby, too; no

false shame, no stupid nonsense or fear of looking a fool about him. She's his sister, I suppose?"

"Yes, Sir Robert," said Daintree. "She's very nice too; *very* nice, but awfully fond of chaff. I must go and renew my acquaintance with her."

"Well, Cecil, glad to see you back and looking so well," said Mr. Monkton, shaking his son's hand, and eyeing him proudly. "Your mother has such a dread of the sea that—you understand. And how are you getting on, Dicky?" he continued, turning to the Nipper, who had just released Vi, giving her a chance of welcoming Cecil. "You have grown, I think."

"Not much, sir, I'm afraid," said Dicky, with a grin. "Ah! there's the uncle at last. How are you, uncle?"

"Not very bright, my boy," answered a benevolent-looking man, with face and figure prematurely old, who had just

reached the top of the ladder, and was now standing, leaning on his stick, and looking done up after his steep climb. “Not very bright, but we shall be right enough now we have our boy home again, shan’t we, Vi? Tell him how we’ve missed him; tell him how we’ve looked forward to this, Vi; tell him——”

But here Mr. Ormby broke down altogether, and Violet, leaving Cecil, came over and took his arm, and the three, Mr. Ormby, his niece and nephew, walked slowly aft.

“Come, come, dear,” said Vi; “this is a poor welcome for our boy; our *man*, I suppose he will want us to call him now. Don’t you wish you may get it, Mr. Cheeky?” and she patted the old man’s hand, looking laughingly across at the Nipper, who had his uncle’s other arm.

“Oh, you think yourself no end of a swell now you tie your hair in a nob, and

wear a tail, but we know that she's only a baby, don't we, uncle?"

"Now, no quarrelling, young people," said Mr. Ormby, gaily, quite recovered now, and looking with pride at his two young supporters.

"You old darling," said Vi, giving his arm an enormous squeeze; "we won't even shake our fists at each other."

They were greatly alike, this brother and sister. The same impertinent-looking little face, with nothing particularly noticeable about it, except its laughing eyes and bright, happy expression. The same cheery voice, the same light build, and quick, excited movements.

She, although only two minutes the senior in age—an indisputable seniority which she never allowed Dicky to forget—had become almost a woman during his year's absence, whilst he remained a child—or little more—still.

Vi Ormby was emphatically a dainty little morsel, and so thought Daintree as he came down the poop ladder to meet her. A close-fitting dress of navy blue, short enough to show her small feet and ankles; but not *too* short. Close enough to show to advantage her compactly moulded bosom, and to give an idea of the fulness of her well-rounded limbs; but not so close as to suggest that most horrible of modern savageries, tight-lacing. The sauciest of hats, the most suitable of ribbons; her full lips and short nose; the very irregularity of every feature serving to complete the happy picture, and render it more attractive. Add to it a sunburnt, healthy complexion, and what more can I say to introduce to you the dearest, jolliest little girl that God ever “laid the keel” of.

I loved *once*—in fact, I believe I love still—*two* girls who would answer to the above description. One is a near rela-

tion, the other—a chum of hers. But forward.

“How are you, Mr. Daintree? We have not met since you became flag-lieutenant. Let me congratulate you. Oh! I insist upon it!” Daintree held up his hand beseechingly. “We think him taller since his promotion to so great a dignity, don’t we, darling?”

“Speak for yourself, Vi, speak for yourself,” said Mr. Ormby, shaking his head amusedly.

“No, please don’t, Vi. I may call you Vi still, may I not? You are only sixteen, you know, and haven’t even ‘come out’ yet; and as for the dignity of a flag-lieutenant, why they did away with the ‘hauling down’ promotions six months ago, and I was appointed too late to gain anything. My usual luck. Please don’t say any more. Dicky, protect me!” and the little man tried to shelter himself behind the still smaller Nipper.

“Shall we let him off, dear?” Vi looked pleadingly at her uncle. “I don’t think he *means* to be dignified, and I’m sure he will try to be good.”

“She’s quite incorrigible, Mr. Daintree, I assure you, sir; quite incorrigible,” said the old man; “she seems to grow wilder every day.” They were all half sitting, half leaning, on the after hatchway now, and he placed his hand caressingly on Vi’s shoulder as he continued, “She’s quite beyond me, sir, quite beyond me; I must send her away to a young ladies’ finishing school.”

“You *dear* old thing. I won’t have you so mutinous! Where should ‘we’ be without the head partner? Fancy me at a boarding school! Wouldn’t I make the old cats—ahem! Now there’s nothing to grin at, Dicky, you impertinent boy! I could be awfully meek and good if I liked.” The peculiar tone of Daintree’s “yeth?” would have let him in for a

warm five minutes had not Mr. Monkton and Cecil now joined them, the former saying, “I’m afraid the Ottorose Smiths will be quite tired of waiting. Cecil says he can come on shore with us until to-morrow morning, and bring Dicky; so they will get into plain clothes at once.”

“Well, come down to the ward-room and sit down,” said Daintree.

“What do you say, Violet, shall we go down?” asked Mr. Monkton.

“No, thank you, not to-day,” said Vi; adding, as she turned to her uncle, “We must not climb any more ladders, must we, dear? They won’t be long.”

In ten minutes Monkton and the Nipper appeared in the ordinary garb of the citizen, and, leaving word for their portmanteaus to be sent in during the afternoon, they, together with Mr. Ormby and Vi, and Mr. Monkton, joined the Ottorose Smiths in their yacht, and sailed merrily away for Southsea pier.

“Are you a better sailor than you used to be, Vi?” asked that dreadful boy the Nipper. “Do you remember how you shrieked, and held on to Cecil, when we went for a sail in the cutter, and about two drops of spray came in over the bows?”

“Don’t be so feeble, Dicky. How can you say I held on to Cecil; you know he wouldn’t let me. Oh! you needn’t shake your head, Cecil; I remember you told me that you did not care to be squeezed by anyone under sixteen. I am nearly *seventeen* now” — she had arrived at her sixteenth birthday last week — “so beware of my pinches. Besides, Dicky,” she continued, indignantly, “it was blowing quite a gale of wind and I don’t think that a certain little unfledged pocket Nelson altogether enjoyed himself that day.”

“Bosh!” scornfully remarked the Nipper. “All I know is that poor Cecil’s arm was

quite blue after it; I can swear to that; and as for the roughness, it was blowing a gentle soldier's wind, and there was just the smallest possible lop on."

"What does our friend call a soldier's wind?" asked Colonel Ottorose Smith, rather grimly.

"A wind blowing at right angles to the place you sail to and from, so that it is, of course, 'fair' both ways, and therefore very suitable to the boating soldiery. Generally speaking, too, there's not very much of it; making it even *more* suitable to the boating soldiery, sir."

The colonel's grim look did not relax much at the Nipper's explanation, but he contented himself by giving orders to "Ease off the fore sheet! Don't keep her so much to windward," showing that he, at any rate, was a soldier of boating capabilities.

At length the pier was reached, and with many injunctions from Vi to her

uncle, all given in her amusingly affectionate way, to “Take care of yourself, darling! Now I must leave you just for *one* minute! What *will* you do without me?” &c., &c., a landing was effected. Mrs. Ottorose Smith and Vi drove off to Nonpariel Villa, taking Mr. Ormby with them, as Vi said that “Nothing could induce her to leave her darling, with *no proper* person to look after him,” and “as the gentlemen would not let her walk home with them”—dissenting murmurs from the gentlemen—“her pet must be good, and drive with the ladies.” The colonel, Mr. Monkton, Cecil and Dicky walked across the common, and they all arrived at the villa together at about one o’clock. Mrs. Monkton was lying on the sofa when they entered the drawing-room; her maid sitting by her and bathing her forehead with Eau de Cologne. She was one of the little fragile women—“class *bric-à-brac*” Daintree would have it—who

having been pretty when young, still crave for admiration, and suffer for their late hours and “ the duty one owes to society ” as they prettily put it—by being constantly prostrated by sick headaches and neuralgia ; until at last they give up the fight ; throw up the sponge—perhaps one should say the *powder puff*!—and take to religious books and homœopathy. This particular specimen of the class, though vain and conceited as a Persian, was kinder hearted and less selfish than most of her kind. Cecil was only her step-son ; his mother having died about four years after he was born. However, Mr. Monkton had shortly afterwards married his present wife—then an engaging girl of seventeen—and Cecil having been taught as a child to call her mother, still kept up the name, as it pleased his father. Mrs. Monkton was now nearly forty, but looked at least five years younger. She seemed really pleased to see Cecil again, and as

he kissed her and placed his cool hand caressingly on her burning forehead, enquiring tenderly if she felt better now, it was easy to see that the tall athletic man of seven-and-twenty made every allowance for, perhaps almost admired the weakness of, his conceited little step-mother.

She would not eat anything herself, but sat in an arm-chair in the dining room whilst the others had luncheon. Mr. Monkton, in his quiet methodical way, poured her out a glass of sherry and handed it to her, but was far too calm to worry himself as to whether she drank it or not. She did drink it, and had another. It is another characteristic of the class to which she belonged—partiality for stimulants.

“There seem to be more villas, semi-detached and otherwise, in this same Southsea than in any other town—or village, as they call it—in existence,” said Monkton.

“And more naval and military officers, on half-pay and otherwise, to occupy them,” chimed in the colonel; evidently considering the subject a personal grievance.

“What nice old fellows some of them are! I think they *are* so jolly! much better than the *Hims*, Ancient and Modern of Bath.” And Vi attacked her drum stick vigorously, nodding her head encouragingly to her uncle, who found eating a much more difficult matter. She *had* an appetite, had Miss Violet Ormby; no liver-wing-and-part-of-the-bosom sort of play; no toying with the breast of an ortolan for her! She was not ashamed of her appetite either; she did not think it necessary, as some young ladies do, to pose before their male friends as interesting delicate creatures; although in reality only reserving their powers for the good solid supper provided by their maids, and awaiting them upstairs. No! I write of a sensible girl.

“What is the programme for this afternoon?” said she. “I suppose you will not go out, Mrs. Monkton?”

“Oh, no, dear! I shall lie down in my room again. Annette will read me to sleep.”

“Would you like me to read to you?” This in fear and trembling. Mrs. Monkton could scarcely repress a little shudder as she said, “No, thank you, dear; your voice would make me too wakeful, I think. Annette has just the right sort of low, droning tone. Emily was talking of going for a drive this afternoon; you should go with her.” Emily was Mrs. Smith—I beg her pardon! Mrs. Ottorose Smith—and Mrs. Monkton’s elder sister.

“Certainly, I should like to,” said Vi. “But perhaps Mrs. Ottorose Smith will not care to take charge of that wild boy of mine; for where I go, Dicky goes, on this our first day together. Now, don’t look cross, you ungracious child,” she whispered

to the Nipper ; “ thank the lady, and look pleasant ; you ought to be glad to sit in an English carriage once more.”

“ I hate being driven about ; it’s only fit for girls,” he muttered ; but Vi looked so reproachfully at him that he added aloud, with as good a grace as could be worked up in the time, “ I shall be very glad to come if I may.” Whereupon Vi hastened to kiss him and call him the best of boys ; bestowing a second salute upon Mr. Ormby, as she declared amidst a general laugh that “ no one would believe how jealous my old darling is.”

“ We will get ready then,” said Mrs. Ottorose Smith, sailing towards the door. She was a ponderous woman. “ What are you gentlemen going to do ? ”

“ I must get through my writing, after I’ve had a cigar,” said the colonel, in his strictest service tones ; and one would have imagined, to hear that colonel’s tones, that if he did not consume that cigar, and

proceed to “get through” that “writing” with all possible despatch, a calamity, little short of total annihilation, would befall the whole British army. In my capacity of tale-writer, I watched the colonel after he had retired to “the colonel’s *study*.” I watched him smoke *a* cigar! I watched him smoke another. I watched him smoke one portion of a third, and I picked up the other portion of that third from the floor, as the colonel calmly slept, and the British army rushed on to its impending dissolution. I watched him calmly sleep for two hours; I watched him awake! Breathlessly, I watched him attach his signature thus: *T. W. Ottorose Smith*, to an all important document. I breathed again. “For the future no non-commissioned officer or private of the 120th regiment would leave barracks without white gloves,” and so—the British army was saved. But, whilst reaching this happy consummation, we have left the non-

saviours in the dining-room. To return!

“And *you*, darling, must have your little nap; come over to the arm-chair,” and Vi walked her uncle off in triumph, and made him comfortable.

“Come, Cecil, we’ll have our cigars on the sea wall!” said Mr. Monkton.

“With pleasure, sir,” and the party broke up until dinner time. When they met again all the talk was of the cruise and the more public events of the past year, and, of course, Cecil’s little actress and the child came under discussion.

At about eleven o’clock Cecil and Dicky started off for the Pier Hotel, where they were putting up for the night, Vi whispering to Cecil, as he said good-bye, “I’m sure you are desperately in love with Mary Lawrence, and if you are not you ought to be, for I’m certain she’s a darling.”

“Every one seems to rank as a darling in your estimation, young woman. We don’t all fall in love so easily.”

“You are not a darling, sir! I hate you. I'll never speak to you again.” Cecil laughed, pretending to look frightened, but he felt a little uneasy after he had turned in at “The Pier;” not at Vi's hating him, that was a very ancient, oft-recurring threat, but at her coupling his name with that of Mary Lawrence.

“No, it's all humbug! I'm not in love! I should like to know though what a fellow really *does* feel like when he's in for the desperate passion; the whole intense hog; I certainly liked talking to Mary, but as for feeling the walking on air, delicious enchantment sort of business, and going through all the other ‘not of this world’ sensations that the fond lover is supposed to experience, that I as certainly do *not*. No! I'm not in love, or if I am I'm a deuced short distance in. She's a good little girl, though, for an actress, and her father! Well, her father's a—— but, perhaps, I'd better

not worry myself about him. I might dream of the old villain, confound him ! Fancy that little wretch Vi daring to chaff, actually daring to chaff about my Gibraltar friends. What a child she was when we left ! The little woman has improved wonderfully in looks, and—and—" Here Cecil's thoughts ended, as thoughts generally do, in a comfortable bed, and it is hardly to be wondered at that the last person of whom he thought when awake was the only one who appeared in his dreams.



CHAPTER IX.

THE good old “Blue Posts” has passed away, but in the days of which I write there was still a “Keppel’s Head,” or “Nut,” as it was appropriately nick-named. Alas! that also has passed away, at any rate, as far as naval officers are concerned. Our sea friends now rendezvous at “Townsend’s” which is situated conveniently close to the dockyard gates, and which, though not possessing an attractive exterior, is comfortable internally, if you only have sufficient resolution to get through the narrow passage, and find your way upstairs to the coffee, smoking, or billiard rooms. *Ware Bar* on the right hand side as you pass, for

the drinks are good and tempting, and “mine fat Host” and lean Hostess smile on our potations.

However, “Townsend’s” in those days *was* not; or, if it *was*, not even Townsend himself knew it, and it is with the “Nut” that we have to do. A busy time its proprietor, old George Clark, was having, when the Portsmouth division of the Channel fleet was at home. The “Nut” was then in full swing, and as the “Nut” was then, so is “Townsend’s” now; so I imagine was the “Blue Posts” of ancient sailing days’ notoriety.

To the “Nut” then, with its dirty little smoking-room, clouded with fumes arising from baccies of every description; curling upwards from the short black Irish clay bowl, full of strong ship’s baccy, as well as from the best of Havannahs and Manillas and cigars of India and China, which the wily mariner has contrived to bring home free of duty.

The “Nut,” with its stuffy little coffee-room, at *some* hours full of hungry naval men; at *all* hours dusty and dirty-windowed; but where you could get as good a chop, and a far better sole than in any hotel for miles around. The “Nut,” with its ancient retainer, “Sarah,” to intimates, Sally; its often-cursed-at boy, “Cupid;” its general factotum, William—good old boss-eyed William! Ah! the good old days! the good old *sea-dogs* who rounded the Horn in 1832 and lived on ship’s biscuits with weavils for a treat. But the service, we know, has gone to the devil; or, do they say, *is going*. The glory has departed out of Israel, or *is departing*. We have no boss-eyed William at “Townsend’s;” Sallies are *plentiful* certainly, but not half so ancient, and the cupids are becoming too respectable altogether.

The *Thunderbomb* and *Hercules* have both come up harbour to “pay off;” the

former to-morrow (Saturday), the latter on Monday. Ever since their arrival last Thursday week, these two ships have been lashed alongside the jetty. The "Nut" has been crowded, the smoke denser, the soles and the dust more plentiful than ever. Seven a.m. at the "Nut." The youngsters begin to move, having to be on board their ships, either at Spithead or in the Royal Dockyard, by eight o'clock.

"Sarah! Cupid! Sally! Somebody! Anybody! There's not a single towel here." The voice, in gradually increasing shrillness, proceeded from the bath-room, and was quickly followed by its dripping and indignant owner. "Now look here, Mary! — I —" The assistant chambermaid, who was vigorously dusting the stairs, *did* look and fled, closely pursued and soon overtaken by the slippers of the bather. The dripping Nipper—for he it was—proceeded upstairs, having first carefully hidden the

dust pan ; and a rush of half a dozen fellows, anxious for a tub, followed his return to his double bedded room. Its other occupant was nearly dressed when Dicky entered.

“ I don’t believe that lazy beggar of a Slug is up yet,” said he. “ Let’s go and dig him out.”

The Nipper was nothing loathe, and they noiselessly sallied forth. Several rooms had to be passed before they reached the Slug’s, and from them some half-dozen recruits were picked up. On entering his, they found him gracefully reclining on his bed. Without pausing to admire his attitude of sweet repose, the members of the party ranged themselves on either side of the bed, and at a sign from the Nipper, the blankets were rolled rapidly around him, and his body raised aloft. A few struggles and muffled sounds from the “ body,” and a noisy altercation amongst the bearers as to their next move, and then

the latter marched towards the stairs, followed at a short distance by some subs and senior midshipmen, who had tumbled out to see the fun.

Slowly the procession moved down-stairs ; a sheet thrown over the body, an occasional, quickly suppressed kick, the only sign of life underneath.

“ Lord a’ mercy on us, if it ain’t dead ! Help ! murder ! ” shrieked Mary, as they came in sight. “ Here Sarah ! Sarah ! ” and away she ran to the kitchen.

“ Oh Lor ! it give me such a turn.” She sank into a chair, pressing her hand upon her voluminous bust.

“ What’s the matter, ye great gaby ? What give ye a turn ? ” snapped out Sarah. “ Now it ain’t no manner o’ use faintin’.” Mary acquired a more upright position. “ No, nor going into ’stericks ! ” Mary stilled the convulsive twitching of her rosy lips, and pouted indignantly. “ Do you hear ? ” continued Sarah, ap-

proaching the maid with an ominous frown, suggestive of a “good shaking,” gathering upon her not too feminine brow. “What give you a turn? The young gents a trying on their games belike?”

“*He'll* never try his games no more, poor dear,” sobbed Mary. “He’s a’ cut off in the bloom of ‘is youth; and I—I—Sarah, could you!—*could* you draw a small half pint!—ah!—I never see so ghastly a face! *He'll* make an ‘evingly corpse, with ‘is wild starin’ eyes! the vivid ‘ue of ‘is pale cheeks, and ‘is—”

“Who in the world’s the gal talking on? We don’t want any of your *Family ‘Eruld* sensations here, and so I tell you, young woman. Bless us! What’s this?”

The procession having reached the foot of the stairs, now slowly and mournfully approached.

“What is it? Who is it? Mr. Hormsby, which of the young orficers is it? Dear heart alive! Who is it?”

“Hush, Sarah! Hush!” replied the Nipper; the echoing “’sh” being taken up feelingly by the other mourners, notwithstanding their severe exertions to force the Slug’s legs and arms to preserve the necessary corpse-like stiffness.

“But, body o’ me, young gents, is he dead? Lay him down gently, do. Poor dear! To think that one of my young gents should a’ come to this.” Almost crying, the good old creature turned fiercely upon the tender hearted chamber maid. “Mary, you blubbering, great gauk, help the young gents, can’t you! Oh lor! and in my kitchen, too! Poor dear young man! Poo-oo-r de-ee-ar!”

Irrepressible choking sounds were now distinctly audible, proceeding from the funeral party; and, with such an example before them, it behoved Sarah and Mary to become demonstrative. Hysterical sobs resounded through the culinary department; Mary indulging occasionally in the

“heart-rending, piercing shriek,” which she learnt from *The London Reader* was indispensable ; and another spectator soon appeared upon the scene, in the shape of “William.” Whether his crooked eye had enabled him to see round the corner, before entering, and so to spot a mischievous look upon some of the “mourners” faces ; whether their supernaturally solemn countenances, *after* his entrance, aroused his suspicions—and a long acquaintance with middies and their artless tricks had made him a confirmed suspect—or whether the half suffocated and rigidly-held Slug succeeded, at that moment, in getting room enough to give a palpable kick, remains unknown. Certain it is, that that most astute of head waiters “William of the Nut,” after shaking off the sobbing Mary—who saw her chance directly he entered, and “threw herself wildly into his arms,” à la *Family Herald* heroine—walked straight to the “evingly corpse,” and the-

youngsters, seeing the game was up, with one consent threw the sheet over the heads of the wailing females, and fled, William expressing it as his opinion that they young gents was reg'lar spirited ones, and he liked to see it, proceeded to unroll the Slug, and assist him to sit up, breathless and panting.

“Aren’t ye ashamed o’ yourself, Mr. Barnaby, frightenin’ a body out o’ her wits? Answer me that, sir,” said Sarah.

“Yes; and when two lone females is bemoanin’ your sad fate, you comes to life again, a’ purpose to spite ’em. It’s shameful, sir! It’s--it’s—onfeelin’, and—and onthankful,” sobbed Mary, continuing, hysterically, “Leave us, perfidious Halbion! Be still, my bustin’ ’eart! Be still!”

“Don’t be a fool, Mary, and do ’old yourself up,” said Sarah, violently shaking her subordinate, and thereby overcoming a decided tendency on the part of the latter to encircle the *late* body, the now astounded Slug, with her maiden arms.

“And, perhaps, sir,” she continued, to that wretched victim, “now that you are *quite* satisfied, you’ll leave my kitchen, or—.” The rest of the sentence was lost amongst a long row of cloths, from which Sarah proceeded to select a particularly dirty one.

“But what have I done?” helplessly enquired poor Barnaby from amongst his blankets. “It’s too bad! You’re always at me!”

“What ‘ave you *done*, sir?” demanded Sarah. “What ‘ave you *done*, sir!” shrieked Sarah! “What ‘aven’t you done, you mean, young gentleman! But I’ll ‘ave no more of it,” she continued, waxing furiously wrathful. “You’ll sham dead, will you, Mr. Barnaby?”—more ominous preparations with the dish cloth—“you’ll hact green, will you, Mr. Barnaby?—Now then, *are* you a’going to leave my kitchen, sir?”

“But, Sarah!” said the blushing and

romantic maiden, “surely you wouldn’t ’ave him leave with only ’is night—that is per’aps he has almost nothing—I mean he may be nearly—Oh! I don’t know what I mean!—undressed!” and she hid her red face with her redder hands.

“Hoity, toity; Miss Mock Modesty! I don’t know what’s right and proper, don’t I? Then p’raps you’ll carry him upstairs, blankets and all. Mr. William will ’elp you, I dessay; he ain’t much of a ornament to the kitchen a’ grinnin’ there!”

“Come along, Mary. Now, sir, are you ready?” laughed William.

“No, I’m not,” yelled the almost recovered Slug. “I’ve been carried about enough, and abused enough for one day, all for nothing, and I won’t stand it!” And leaving his blankets behind him, with night coat-tails flying in the breeze, he bolted for the door as rapidly as did the man of Egyptian notoriety; Mary

shrieking and averting her shocked face *after* he had disappeared.

Most perfect, even childish innocence met his stormy indignation upstairs, and he was fain to hurry on sulkily with his dressing, and to follow his late tormentors to the Royal Dockyard.

The *Thunderbomb* was to pay off “all standing,” so the officers were able to live comfortably on board until the very last day of the commission.

“Monkton and I are going to have our people on board to afternoon tea, to-day,” said Dicky. “Give the butter a fair wind, Slug! Will some of you fellows come and help to entertain them?”

“Where are you going to give them tea?” asked Bentley, who, much to the Nipper’s disgust, came down from deck just in time to hear his question.

“In the ward-room, I think; will you come?” Dicky did not look eager to have his invitation accepted.

“Don’t know ; perhaps I will. Is that pretty little chum of yours—the girl you kissed—coming ? ”

“My sister is coming, certainly,” replied the Nipper.

“I don’t care a d—— whether she’s your sister or not ; you’ll bring her down to the gun-room.”

“Of course we shall look round the ship, and most likely come in here ; but we shan’t stop long.”

“Oh, you won’t stop long ! Now look here, Mr. Richard Ormby, you’ll just bring her down here, and get her to stop until you see I’m tired of her, d’ye see ? ”

“Shut up, Bentley,” said Rice, angrily. “Don’t you hear she’s his sister. You talk like a brute ! ” Bentley glared around, but it was near the end of the commission, and fellows murmured approval, and calmly ate their breakfast. “All right,” he said, viciously to Rice ; “you needn’t make a song about it. We

can't all express ourselves as well as you do. Not all of us are eligible to become members of the 'Young Men's Christian Crumpet Society.' But I see nothing so particularly disrespectful to Miss Ormby in wishing to show her my photos!"

"I'm sure she will be very glad to see them," said Dicky, hastily, anxious to smooth down Bentley, and prevent a row. "Last day but one; take it all in fun," he continued, cheerily. And the unfortunate Slug received a carefully rolled pellet of bread well in the eye.

"Steward, put Mr. Ormby down for a shilling fine for chucking bread about," said Rice, as the Nipper disappeared through the door, pursued by Barnaby, who wildly brandished a Dirk scabbard—which he had dragged down from between the beams—and glared ferociously with his *one* serviceable eye. The chase soon ended, as hundreds had before, when the Slug had performed the part of "hound," he being

tripped up by the very first member of the mess that they came across.

Poor Barnaby ! He was a good natured, honest fool. *Too* good-natured and too great a fool to escape becoming the butt of any mess he joined, but still, not quite such a fool as he looked, or as his mess-mates thought him.

At 4 o'clock Cecil and the Nipper were ready to receive their guests.

“Let’s go out to the gates, Dicky, and then we can all walk in together. Driving over those infernal dockyard paving *rocks* is the very deuce ; or perhaps it would be better if you went to bring them down whilst I wait to receive them on board.”
Cunning, lazy, Cecil !

“All right ! I’ll do escort, or chaperone, or whatever you call it.” And the Nipper started off, swelling with importance. He arrived at the gates just as their guardians—stolid, dignified bobbies of the metropolis—were condescending to slowly

throw them open for the Ottorose Smiths' carriage to pass through.

Mrs. Ottorose, Mrs. Monkton, and two of their young friends were in the carriage. Female friends they were, natives of Southsea ; Blanche and Margaret Dutton, known amongst the males of their particular clique as "frills" and "cuffs," and rather proud of being so known.

"There's Dicky!" said Margaret, as the coachman pulled up.

"Come along ! Jump in ! There's plenty of room for a small one between Blanche and me."

"No, thank you !" said the Nipper ; "the small one doesn't care to be squeezed any smaller, however nicely it may be done. I've come to tell you all, that you must please get out and walk." Mrs. Monkton sighed.

"Well I, for one, am very glad to obey orders," said Blanche ; or, to be intimate, "Frills ;" adding, as they all alighted, "I

suppose we must allow the infant Dicky to be the ‘Boss’” — shocked looks from chaperones—“to-day.”

Monkton, Daintree, and several other fellows, principally admirers of the articles of female apparel already mentioned, were waiting for them on the quarter-deck. After that short comedietta, known as “pretty feminine nervousness,” or, “the dear creatures’ special little game” had been performed, the Misses Dutton, once more sustaining, with great success, the leading characters, the whole party, now increased by Mr. Monkton, Colonel Ottorose Smith, Mr. Ormby, and Vi, who had walked in together from the villa, got safely over the brow, the bridge between the jetty and the ship.

“Come on board to join, sir!” said Vi, touching her hat to Cecil.

“That’s the right thing to do, isn’t it?”

“It’s right enough, undoubtedly,” said

Cecil, laughingly. “I only wish it was *true*, too. Don’t you, Daintree?”

“What would the old doctor say to a female messmate?” said the flag lieutenant, as they started in a body on a tour of inspection.

“That’s where the sergeant of marines is buried.” “On that bench the midshipmen are tied, when their noses are slit, and marked with a broad arrow;” and so on, with many ejaculations of “Oh!” and “Nonsense! I don’t believe a word of it!” “Is it *really!*” from Vi. The garrison hacks —no, I don’t mean that, I hate the term— The two “young ladies who doted on the services” were old hands at ship visiting, and were not to be imposed upon by the artful Nipper.

“How tired the old pet looks!” said Vi, appealing to the assembled company, after the ladies had taken off their hats and cloaks, and were comfortably going in for tea and scandal in the ward-room.

“Give him a cup of tea at once, please, Cecil, with two enormous nobs of sugar in it. He shall be an invalid and be helped first.”

Mr. Ormby looked quite prepared to be contented with any arrangement Vi might make.

“Lovely woman is the sugar; spoons we poor men ofttimes be,” sang Cecil. “If you don’t agree with me,” added he, “I refer you to the author of “*Geneviève de Brabant*.”

“Oh, do sing the song properly!” said Miss Dutton (Cuffs), with pretty, wayward eagerness.

“I will some day, if *you* will play my accompaniment.” — Cecil! Cecil! Why lower your voice? Why look tenderly at the hopeful maiden? You humbug!”

“You know I will, if *you* ask me,” said she. *She* did it well, too. The half eager “you know I will,” with a glance of bright eyes; then the shyly drooped eyelids, the

half averted face, the deepening colour and the expressive, “if *you* ask me.” It was well done. And she meant it all, about as much as he did. Margaret! Margaret! You humbug! How often have you been through the performance?

“Mr. Daintree is very silent,” she continued. “Perhaps he will explain why! Is it not rude of him, Blanche?”

“Don’t be angry,” said Daintree, in a voice as melancholy as a droning bagpipe. “When I think of to-morrow, I declare I——”

“Get poetical! I was certain of it,” broke in Vi. “Now, have you not written something about ‘paying off?’ I’m sure you have! Do let us hear it, or could you not *sing* it to us? Judging from your dismal aspect, it would just go to the tune of the ‘Old Hundredth.’ I’m not certain that I could play the accompaniment, but it ought not to be very difficult. Shall we try?”

“Thank you; *no*. My verses express the overflowing of a full heart, and as such are, of course, *sacred*, but not of necessity solemn enough to be sung to the tune of our old familiar friend.”

“Well, give us your ‘sacred song,’ old boy, and let us judge for ourselves,” said Cecil, amid a general laugh; Daintree holding up his hands imploringly. “Now, ladies and gentlemen,” he continued, “listen to the overflowing of a full heart.”

“Well, but it *is* hard, isn’t it, Vi?” appealed Daintree. But Vi only laughed and shook her head, and he continued thoughtfully, “The force of precedent, I suppose, and I can’t help feeling it. It used to break the ‘old salts’ heart-strings in the good old days to bid their ships farewell, and—I don’t want to rake up old grievances—but why, oh! why mayn’t I break a few heart-strings, *too*? ”

“Break away, old fellow; break into

song," said Cecil, " and we may be induced to shed a tear as well."

" Listen, then. Some of my ideas are strikingly touching. They run like this—

Old *Thunderbomb*, old *Thunderbomb*,

The time has come

To say farewell;

My feelings pent up find a vent,

In wailing spent

O'er you, *ma belle*.

Adieu, adieu, once more we two

Seek comrades new,

My three years' mother;

A friend you are, that sticketh far

Closer than tar,

Or wife, or brother.

Good-bye, good-bye, old ship, say I,

Blow low, blow high,

Thou'st been my cradle;

In smooth and rough, scarce grub enough,

For "salt horse tough"

Thou wast the stable.

Farewell, farewell, no more to dwell

Within that cell,

"My cabin" named;

Where he who'd swing a cat, poor thing,

It's end would bring,

And *he'd* be blamed.

Old *Thunderbomb*, old *Thunderbomb*,

The time has come

To part, ah me!

My feelings sink, mine eyes both wink,

Mine eyelids blink, and from their brink,

Tears outward shrink, whene'er I think

Of each fond link

Twixt you and me.

The flag lieutenant, who had risen from

his chair wiping his eyes, and giving out the last few lines in convulsive gasps, now sank back into Monkton's arms, seemingly in a state of total collapse. Cecil held him tenderly as he murmured, "Don't pity me, ladies. Don't feel for me. Above all, *don't*, oh! *do not* pet or fondle me. But give me *tea*, more, *much* more tea, and let me pass away in easy stages of indigestion. It's all I ask, except a small sized hammock, two little shot, and a sailor's grave in the lone, lone sea."

"Steward," sang out Cecil, "a brandy and soda for Mr. Daintree. I think that's nearer your form, old fellow. You'd want an odd sort of tune for that last sacred verse of yours."

Daintree smiled sadly. "Ah, my feelings ran away with me there," said he; adding in a whisper to Miss Blanche Dutton, "They always do when *you* are near." Whereupon Miss Blanche Dutton

smiled, blushed a little, a *very* little, opened her sleepy, blue eyes, and giggled. Expressive word; I must use it again--giggled.

“I’m sure it was very nice, quite—a—quite—a—*talented*,” said Mrs. Monkton, referring to the poetry with the slightest possible amount of interest in her voice.

We all know the peculiar sort of drawling tone which women who have been pretty when young adopt after a *certain* age. Mrs. Monkton had arrived at that long deferred period, and drawlingly she continued, “Might I have a cushion from your cabin, Cecil? Ah! Thank you. And I think I must have left my vinai-grette there. Yes, I thought so. Thank you, so much. By-the-bye, you remember those three Miss Darrells, Mr. Daintree?”

“*I* do,” burst forth Mr. Irrepressible Dicky, who had been making himself generally useful. “*I* do. You mean the world, the flesh, and the devil.”

“Hush, Dicky, you naughty boy,” said Vi.

“I was not aware that they rejoiced in such pe-culiar names, Dicky. It is really *too* good of you to tell me,” said Mrs. Monkton.

The Nipper murmured, “Don’t mention it,” and favoured the Misses Dutton with an expressive wink.

“Well, Mr. Daintree,” continued Mrs. Monkton, “one of the three—I think, taking them in seniority, that it must be the—a—female Old Gentleman,” and she smiled complacently at her little joke, “has married an officer of artillery”

“Easily caught, those gunners. Susceptible fellows,” remarked Daintree.

“Why she was the one who, according to Southsea gossip, forbade the banns of some fellow at a small country church, because she wanted him herself,” said the colonel.

“A hint for you, Vi!” casually remarked

Cecil ; but it passed unnoticed by the suddenly-deaf and unconscious young lady.

“When I—was at—Oxford,” came slowly and hesitatingly from old Mr. Ormby, “an old schoolfellow of mine was—married ; I forget his name, but *she* was a very—pretty girl, and—and you recollect her, Vi ! She has quite a large family now.” The old man paused, thoughtfully, and looked around with a smile. “Yes, of course, dear. I want Cecil to give you just one more cup of tea.” Vi looked troubled. “My uncle was never at Oxford or Cambridge,” she whispered to Mrs. Ottorose Smith. “He is tired, and then he often fancies he has been to places that he has never been *near*, and done things which have never really happened. Poor old darling.”

“But you *do* recollect, don’t you, Vi ?” persisted Mr. Ormby.

“Of course, darling. I shall be very angry if you don’t believe me. It was

fifteen years before I was born," she added, *sotto voce*, with a little, pained smile.

"Well, I must say, I did not care much about those Darrell girls," said Cecil, taking up the conversation again. "I remember stepping on the toes of one of them; the 'flesh' I think it was—the *fat* one, at any rate—at the assembly rooms one night, and when I begged her pardon, she simpered out 'granted.' Ugh! I *hate* a girl who says 'granted.'"

"I should rather think you did," said Bentley, who now joined them, having paused at the door for a moment to threaten to break the Nipper's head for not bringing his sister to the gun-room as ordered.

"I always thought that people of the milliner class had a sort of monopoly of the expression," said Mrs. Monkton. "I trust I shall never be obliged to meet a *lady* who uses it," she added, with a shudder. "But, as I was telling you, Mr. Daintree, Om has married an artilleryman, and

both the others are engaged to naval officers."

"By Jove! you don't say so! *Both* of them? Easily caught, those naval men! Impressionable fellows," remarked Daintree, and Blanche smiled sweetly on him.

"It must be the regular marrying year for the Darrell family. I conclude they have a special time for that sort of thing, like the East Indians of the Kumbi caste, who are only permitted to carry on marriage ceremonies once in *twelve* years," said Monkton.

"Good gracious! How hor—I mean, what a funny thing!" ejaculated Miss "Cuffs."

"Yes, as you say—How horrible!" assented Monkton.

"Oh, Mr. Monkton! you *know* I didn't; you are *too* bad," from the lady.

"Well, there was a great row about it some little while ago," continued Cecil. "I happened to be at Kurrachee at the time. It appears that some of the Kumbi-

ites, or Kumbites, calculated that the right year had come, and were consequently all dead on for matrimony, but the others said, no ; the calculations were wrong, and there were two more years to wait. Rather a nuisance for the poor, love-sick maidens, eh, Vi ?”

“ Much worse for the spooney bachelors, sir. I suppose the ones who said ‘no’ were *already* married,” she added, laughingly.

“ What was the result, Cecil ? What did the poor black creatures do ?” languidly enquired Mrs. Monkton, sniffing her salts at the bare thought of them.

“ Don’t know ; I expect the lovers carried the day, and got spliced all right.”

“ Ah ! ” said Mr. Ormby, from his arm-chair ; “ when I was at Cambridge, and engaged to your dear aunt, Vi, we did not wait twelve years. We went off one morning to church — I forget the name ; and—and—you recollect the church, Vi !

I remember your dear aunt fainting during the ceremony ; you recollect, Vi!"

"Of course, dear. He was never at Cambridge," she whispered.

"Will you tell them the story, Vi," said the old man, peevishly. "Not now, uncle ; we are just going, you know," said Vi. "Please make a move, Mrs. Ottorose Smith." She added in a low voice, "I don't remember ever seeing my aunt."

"I think we must go now, Mrs. Monkton," said Mrs. Ottorose Smith. "We, ladies, require at least one hour's nap before the evening's dance."

The ladies were soon ready to start.

"We shall meet some of you at dinner again, and I suppose you will be all at the ball, so we need not say good-bye," and with a gracious all-including sweep, Mrs. Ottorose Smith sailed across the brow, the gallant Ottorose in tow.

"Oh, Cecil, I have left my handkerchief in the ward-room," said Mrs. Monkton, as

she prepared to brave the crossing. Cecil dived below again and soon returned.

“ You have it with you, mother, I think,” said he.

“ So I have, dear ; it is in my back pocket ; I *am* so sorry ! ”

“ Moral ! Don’t wear back pockets,” laughed Cecil, and his step-mamma sailed slowly after Mrs. Ottorose Smith.

The party walked away leisurely towards the gates, and drove off to “ Nonpareil Villa.”

“ If your sister gives me a dance to-night, I’ll let you off your thrashing ; but if not, look out for squalls, you young beggar.” And having, with terrible jocoseness, twisted the Nipper’s arm, and hit it some dozen times upon the same spot, to create a sore—as he pleasantly explained —the gallant Bentley pushed our little friend down the after-hatchway.

CHAPTER X.

MONKTON, Daintree, and Dicky dined at Nonpareil Villa that evening, as did also the Misses Dutton, who were to appear at the ball under the expansive wing of Mrs. Ottorose Smith. The ladies had decided upon donning their full war paint after dinner, and at 9.30 the men of the party were still awaiting their reappearance in the drawing-room.

“They’ve only been an hour upstairs,” said Daintree, who had kept himself amused by tying knots in the fringe of an anti-macassar. “I give them another thirty minutes at least. By-the-bye, colonel, did you hear of our little excitement this morning?”

The colonel shook his head. As a rule he avoided excitement and dinner claret.

“ Well,” continued Daintree, “ just as the commander-in-chief was giving orders for the dress at the ball to-night, he received the news that the Lord Mackaciac was to be present. Now, Mackaciac’s mother, as everyone knows, is daughter of the reigning queen of the Seaward Islands, and, being so, is undoubtedly *royal*. But Mackaciac’s father, as everyone also knows, is simply Duke of Mackaciac, blue-blooded, certainly, but not *royal*. Now, the question which caused all the excitement and exercised the minds of the naval commander-in-chief and staff, and our old ’Ral and staff was, whether, under those circumstances, Mackaciac *filz* could be considered *royal* or *not*; and, consequently, whether naval officers should appear in *full* dress, royalty being present, or whether we should go in undress only, royalty *not* being present,

and no one outside *the* circle being considered good enough to call for naval full dress. Fine point, wasn't it?"

The others smiled, and the flag-lieutenant resumed: "I trotted out to Government House, saw the general and his staff, and put it to them. But they soon gave it up. *They* didn't have to run about with an extra coat in lavender to bow to royalty in. But they helped us search for precedents, and we—*found none*. Finally we all gave it up, and telegraphed to my lords for instructions. Arrived at their numerous Lordships', Billy Barclay, assistant private secretary to the junior boarder, who had been devouring pen holders since 10 A.M., decided the question in two minutes, and telegraphed my lords' opinions that the presence of half-bred royalty was not good enough to be considered a state occasion. It was a great disappointment to me," said Daintree, dolefully, "as I wanted to air my full-dress coat. I've only worn it twice in

the last four years. Once when I was ‘presented,’ and again when the Prince of Wales and the Sultan came on board us at Spithead. It’s getting rotten rapidly. Class, mouldy.”

“ Useful sort of article to drag round the world in a tin case,” said Cecil. “ I think we had better give up all hope of seeing the ladies again.”

However, in a quarter of an hour the two matrons appeared—Mrs. Ottorose, big, bland, and smiling; Mrs. Monkton, small, languid, and also smiling—and were quickly followed by their three fair charges, all ready and anxious for the fray.

This was Vi’s first large dance, her “ coming out” ball, and though thumb-screws and racks would not have forced the confession from her, she was considerably excited about it.

“ You’d better change your mind and come, Monkton,” said the colonel to Mr. Monkton, senior.

“No, thank you. I shall stop at home and give Mr. Ormby his revenge at chess.”

“Which, being interpreted, means that the horrid man will not give up his cigar,” pouts Mrs. Monkton. Pouting has been one of her points.

“I am afraid, my dear, that it is even as you say,” calmly remarked her husband.

“Well, forward all the remainder of us. Dicky, you won’t mind mounting the box of one of the flys?”

“*Rather* not, colonel. It’s a jolly sight better than being stifled in with——”

“*Quite* so, Dicky. Hold on tight, there’s a good little boy;” and the ladies smiled maliciously, gracefully swooped down upon their trains, and declared themselves ready to start.

Dancing had commenced shortly after 9.30, and the assembly rooms were fairly full by the time they entered.

“There’s the old ‘Ral flying round like a paper man,” said Dicky, with intense delight, as the men waited near the door. “He has the same step for everything, waltz, polka, galop, all the same to him; he gets the same amount of enjoyment out of them all.”

“I wish I could,” sighed the Colonel Ottorose. “Naval officers have no livers, as far as I can see! I suppose they have some sort of patent arrangement that does the duty, and that hot climates and frequent ‘liquors’ have no effect upon them. But as for *livers*! Ah!” The colonel pressed his hand sadly against his right side. “*My* dancing days are over. I’m too old for anything,” he concluded.

“Not a bit of it, sir; awfully old fellows dance the polka now. Rum old sticks they look, too! Ha! ha!”

The colonel not seeming particularly amused at this piece of information, Dicky

turned his attention to his sister, who, looking rather flushed and nervous, had just returned, with the other ladies, from the cloak room.

“Now, Vi, keep your pecker up! you really don’t look so bad; does she, Mrs. Monkton? If you weren’t so jolly red, no one could guess that this is your first appearance.”

“Be quiet, Dicky. She’s half-frightened now,” whispered Mrs. Monkton, tapping him with her fan as she passed, leaning on Cecil’s arm; and they all entered the ball room.

Ranged in picturesque rows, negligently (?) formed into effective groups, each lady taking care to be amongst the right coloured dresses, perhaps that hers should “kill” her neighbours’, stand gracefully, or recline easily, the Southsea maidens, all bent on conquest over the services, but always “according to scale.” Is he a captain R.N.? —he is smiled upon more sweetly than is the

commander. Is he a major?—his “star” sinks below the horizon, as the lieut.-colonel’s “crown” approaches. Beam on, fair damsels; tighten your petticoats; squeeze in your waists! We love you none the less, for the time, for having match-making mammas. *You*, personally, do not know the army and navy lists by heart; *you*, personally, never glance through the naval and military intelligence. Oh, no, we quite understand *that*. Love in a cottage, for the artless “village” maiden.

There was a little excitement amongst the men on the arrival of our special party, for the Ottorose Smiths were well known, and the two Miss Duttons took high rank amongst the Southsea “crawlers.” Mrs. Monkton and Vi had only been down for a week, but visitors are soon known in “the village,” and they had already met everyone who was *meetable*. Cards were rapidly produced, and dances, not previously filled up, were speedily scrawled

opposite, in men's extraordinary ball card hieroglyphics.

“I say, Cecil, old fellow,” whispered the Nipper, “there's Armstrong. I was hoping that he had not left Gib yet. He's talking to Vi.”

“Your sister looks very pleased to meet him again,” said Monkton.

“Oh, yes; I daresay he knows how to make himself agreeable. My uncle likes him, too, and says he has improved ‘Old Court,’ wonderfully.”

“Much better improve himself, I should say,” muttered Cecil.

A moment later, Armstrong came up to them both, and introduced himself, saying, pleasantly and naturally, that although he had not had the pleasure of meeting them before, he thought that he must have seen them at Gib lately; and that, as he knew their people, he hoped they would excuse his coming up to them “in such a casual way, without an introduction.”

Cecil and Dicky were civil, of course, and Armstrong had to leave them, almost immediately, to dance No. 5 with Vi.

“He is evidently bent upon being agreeable,” said Monkton, “and either *does* not, or *will* not know who bowled him over at Gib. All right; I don’t wish to remind him. It was the only time that I have stood forth, a champion of females in distress. It would hardly do to count up the number of ballet girls that one has kissed; and most likely Armstrong put Mary Lawrence down as one of the general run—fair game; but, by Jove, knowing what a dear, good little girl she really is, I couldn’t help bowling him over.”

“*You* will be bowled over in a minute,” said Armstrong, who at that moment stopped near them; Vi, flushed and happy, leaning on his arm. “Who are you going to bowl over, Monkton?” he continued, with a rather peculiar smile. “Let him off, do; there’s a girl at the far end of the room, looking as

if she was expecting her partner; are you not engaged? There she is, and that young-looking commander is making towards her. Three stripes against your two, my dear fellow; you will lose the race, I'm afraid. She's looking this way now; do try if a Southsea girl will haul in her line for a lieutenant, when a commander is nibbling at the hook."

"Whew!" said Monkton, "I see her. By all that's unfortunate, it's Miss Margaret Dutton; I worried her like fun to give me this dance, too."

"You'll catch it," laughed Vi; "and you have made Dicky forget his dance with Bella; they are only just commencing."

Cecil hurried off, as the Nipper, fondly clasping the plump waist of Miss Isabella Manley, waltzed by, "heaving round," as he afterwards asserted, "like bricks."

"Are you ready again, Mr. Armstrong?" asked Vi, too impatient to remain still, listening to the music; "this is a delicious

waltz ; ” and away they whirled once more.

* * * *

“ I cannot apologise sufficiently, Miss Dutton,” said Cecil, after he had succeeded in piloting himself across the room to where the fair “ Cuffs ” sat, awaiting her forgetful partner.

“ Then please don’t attempt to do so,” she interrupted. “ I am very angry with you, and have a good mind to punish you by——”

“ Sitting out this dance ! That’s right, so we will,” said that disgraceful Cecil, as he carefully sat himself down at her side. “ Talking is far better fun than dancing ; don’t you think so ? but of course you do, or you would not have proposed our ‘ sitting out,’ ” he added. “ Let me recite you a fragment of Moore, on ‘ Reason, Folly, and Beauty.’ Listen :

Reason, and Folly, and Beauty they say,
Went to a party of pleasure one day ;
 Folly play’d
 Around the maid ;

The bells of his cap rung merrily out ;
While Reason took
His sermon book—
Oh ! which was the pleasanter no one need doubt ;
Which was the pleasanter no one need doubt.

You, of course, are Beauty, and, as I am doing the talking, I must be Reason. Folly is apparently absent from our merry meeting. Still no remark to offer ! We must have recourse to Moore again.

Down in the valley come meet me to-night
And I'll tell you your fortune truly
As ever I was told by the new moon's light,
To a young maiden shining as newly.

But for the world let no eye be nigh,
Lest haply the stars should deceive me ;
Such secrets between you and me and the sky
Should never go farther, believe me.

Nothing to say to me yet ? We must try a little bit of S. Johnson on 'The Vanity of Human Wishes.' That will draw, I know," thought Cecil, as he continued aloud his recitations, the fair Maggie evidently getting more and more anxious for the dance as her partner showed an increasing eagerness for poetry.

Ye nymphs of rosy lips and radiant eyes,
Whom pleasure keeps too busy to be wise,
Whom joys with soft varieties invite,
By day the frolic, and the dance by night,
Who frown with vanity, who smile with art,
And ask the latest fashion of the heart.
What care, what rules your heedless charms shall save
Each nymph your rival, and each nymph your slave?

How many rivals have you here to-night,
Miss Dutton? Of course *we*, the men,
you know, are all your *slaves*."

"Pray, do you imagine, Mr. Monkton,
that I came here to listen to stupid
poetry?" demanded Miss Dutton, at last
breaking silence.

"Well, I hardly know. Answering in
a general sort of way—for girls in a body,
you know—I should say, with submis-
sion, that they go to a ball for the same
reason that they go to a church, or a
theatre, or a concert—to be looked at."

"I will soon show you that I, at any
rate, came to *dance*," said Maggie, jump-
ing up. "You don't know much about
girls, or you would not talk such nonsense
about them. Besides, I've heard it all

before," she continued, as they whirled off, "and I *do*te on dancing."

"So do I—*now*," whispered Cecil.

Was it *her* fancy, or did the squeeze of his right arm really tighten around her waist as he spoke? Was it *his* fancy, or did her right cheek really sink nearer his shoulder, only to be warned off by his irresponsible epaulette, as she listened?

It is full of subtle fancies, is the graceful waltz. I don't waltz much—I like realities. What do you think, manly dancer?

"May I persuade you to try an ice?" asked Armstrong, as, later on in the evening he finished a turn with Mrs. Monkton.

"Thank you, I *should* like one."

Cecil's step-mamma sank into a chair next to Mrs. Ottorose Smith, just outside the refreshment-room. Mrs. O. S. was fairly good at refreshments.

"He is *so* attentive for such a young man," continued Mrs. Monkton, after

Armstrong had left them. "He talks of organising lots of pic-nics and riding parties when we get home again; and he actually offered me that chesnut of his—beautiful creature—directly I said I admired it. But, of course, Charles will make me refuse it," she added, plaintively.

"Yes, dear; it is refreshing to find a young man so attentive," said Mrs. Ottorose Smith. "I have noticed Vi dancing with him several times. She is with Mr. Bentley now. How the dear child enjoys a little excitement."

"Cecil has only danced with her *once*," said Mrs. Monkton. "He has been carrying on a violent flirtation with Maggie Dutton. It's too bad of the boy, for I know he means nothing in that direction; and there's that amusing Mr. Daintree still in the toils. Blanche is very fond of him, I am sure, but it's hard to tell whether he cares for her or not!"

"It would be a very good thing for

Blanche," observed that young lady's chaperone. "She is a nice girl, but flighty, my dear, very flighty."

"Ah! we were all young *once*, were we not, Mr. Armstrong?" and the fair Mrs. Monkton smiled bewitchingly, as Armstrong returned with an ice for her, and—thoughtful man—another, wherewith to gladden the heart of Mrs. Ottorose Smith.

"It is impossible to imagine at present that Mrs. Monkton will ever have to refer to her *past* youth, except in jest," he replied, gallantly.

He is an agreeable young man is Mr. Jack Armstrong.

* * * *

"And so you are afraid the 'poor, little girl,' as you call her, got awfully fond of you, you most conceited of men? Was she very pretty, Francis?"

Time had flown on to one a.m., when the above remark was made, the above question asked. The place was a secluded

corner in one of the smaller rooms, far removed from the giddy crowd. The speaker was Miss Blanche Dutton, and the listener, Lieutenant the Hon. Francis Daintree, R.N.

The observant reader will note that they have arrived at the *Blanche* and *Francis* period—not difficult that, in a seaport town.

“Her good looks were intense, her fondness intensive,” complacently began Daintree.

“Yes, yes, I daresay,” interrupted the lady. “She was a miracle of beauty and affection, I have no doubt; but *who* was she? Was she—I mean, were her people in society at Gibraltar?”

“Now, Blanche, Blanche, do moderate your transports until you have something to get excited about. Interruption and anxiety to quarrel are your besetting sins. Why so impatient? Why so hasty? Who said anything about Gibraltar? Why rush

at conclusions? The girl I referred to, as growing so fond of me, is nearer than Gib. To put it properly, I love my love with a B, because she's so beatifically beautiful, and so bewitchingly brilliant. I hate her with a B because she's so bitterly bellicose, and so bloomingly blunt. I met her first at a ball on board the *Bellerophon*; her name is *Blanche*, and she's awfully—. Now, now!" He held up his finger, warningly as Blanche moved and attempted to speak. "Don't be naughty, above all things, don't be bellicose. You *are* fond of me, you know you are; and, between ourselves, I'm afraid I'm beginning to rather like you. Keep it dark, Blanche. It's most unfortunate, and I always thought that I wasn't a marrying man. But I suppose I shall have to—. Hulloh! Who *is* that girl? The little one with the exceptionally-low dress and long train? She's a fetching little thing."

"Upon my word," said Blanche—and

she seemed really put out this time—"you are not fit to be trusted in ladies' society at all. I shall write to your mother about you," she added, recovering herself.

"All right! Write away. You won't shake a fond mamma's confidence in her favourite son. She'll tell you that I'm an angel, and, I daresay, believe that she could prove it. I'll define myself in verse for your benefit.

I am my mammy's favourite son,
And she's a widow.
I also am that saint,
That angel without paint,
Who, having kindly undertaken
That 'poor Jack' shan't be forsaken,
Sit's up aloft, and keeps his watch upon the bollow.

"There, that's about her opinion of me. You will know in future, who the 'sweet little cherub who sits up aloft,' is."

"Mothers are the most untrustworthy of a never-to-be-trusted sex. *Never* be a mother, Blanche; that is—never have a mother, I should say. Who *is* that little girl?" And Daintree finding himself

somewhat involved, retreated behind his double glasses.

“Oh, I don’t know ; she’s a stranger,” said Blanche. Continuing inquiringly, but with consummate carelessness, “you were saying just now, that you had decided to——?”

“No, no ! I don’t think I had *decided*, had I ?” said Daintree, eagerly, adding, with some hesitation for *him*, “I was only supposing that I should have to consider, if I hadn’t better think, whether it wouldn’t be better to——”

“Oh mercy, mercy ! that will do,” laughed Blanche, as merrily as she could ; but there was a slight ring of disappointment about it. Mrs. Monkton was right ; Miss “Frill’s” *did* like Daintree ; had cared for him long, and, what was more, meant to marry him. But—fast herself, she knew it did not always do to force the pace in others ; and the flag-lieutenant was safe for to-night.

We will leave them then, still intensifying—as Daintree would put it—their fondness for each other, in seclusion. We came to a *dance*, you know, and must not spend our time in secluded corners and refreshment rooms, although I regret to say that there are gentlemen *and* ladies of my acquaintance, who—

But no! perhaps 'twere best not revile them. We do it ourselves.

* * * *

“This is our dance, I think, Miss Ormby?”

Vi, having enjoyed about one minute's rest under her chaperone's wing, smiled an assent, and took Bentley's arm for the polka. He had not been dancing much; he was *one* of the gentlemen of my acquaintance who—. By Gad! I'm off again! I almost mentioned names that time. Careful, my pen; and ink, be cautious. We will merely mention then with regard to Bentley's dancing (?)

that up to now, he had several times found stimulants absolutely necessary.

“ You are enjoying yourself, thoroughly, I trust ? ” he asked, speaking slowly and with excessive distinctness. “ I scarcely dared to hope that you would be able to give me this dance. You are quite the belle of the evening, Miss Ormby ! ”

Vi laughed merrily. She knew exactly how much to believe of *that*.

“ Did you see Mr. Barnaby ? ” she asked. “ The Slug, you know ! You see I have heard about you all, and know everyone’s nick-name. Well ; did you see him arrive ? ” and she laughed merrily, again.

“ No ! He’s rather a muff ; I don’t care much for him. Now your brother is a fellow we all like. Capital youngster in every way.”

Vi did not laugh this time. She had heard of Bentley as well as of Barnaby, and knew which was considered the knave, which the fool.

“Oh, I think the Slug great fun,” she said. “I intend to make violent love to him some day, if he will let me. But I am very angry with him for making me laugh at him so much this evening.”

“What did the foo—I mean the Slug—do? If he has insulted the prettiest girl, belle of the ball, I’ll—I’ll—”

Vi, looking very surprised and rather uncomfortable at this, to her, quite unaccountable outburst, hastened to explain.

“It was really too splendid,” she said. “I suppose he combined economy with sluggishness, for he was very late and had evidently walked. I am surprised at your not seeing the fun! Where *could* you have been?”

The gallant sub. thought it unnecessary to mention where he “could have been,” and probably *was* when Barnaby arrived; and Vi, not thinking that a low murmur from him about something being “spoilt

by not having a dash of curaçoa" could have anything to do with her question, continued her story.

"It was about half-past ten when he put in an appearance, and *such* an appearance! I thought it would have killed me?" laughed she. "Mr. Armstrong and I were talking near the door of the large dancing-room, and everyone else seemed doing the same, when, all at once, there was silence, quickly broken by a low laugh, in which all the people gradually joined. We soon saw where to look for the joke, for everyone was staring towards the top of the room. There stood the unfortunate Mr. Slug, bowing lowly to Mrs. Ottorose Smith, who, dear old soul, smiled blandly and bowed low in return, utterly unconscious that she was affording amusement for nearly the whole of Southsea. Not much to laugh at in the idea of seeing Mr. Barnaby bow to Mrs. Ottorose Smith,

is there?" Vi paused a moment, expecting a remark of some sort from Mr. Bentley. None came, and thinking him very rude, she continued, "the joke was that, finding himself late, he had evidently been in a great hurry to commence dancing at once. His great coat and hat he had remembered; but his economical arrangements had been forgotten, for his *trowsers* were turned up almost to his knees, and a pair of enormous goloshes encased his pumps. Poor boy! you should have seen his face when that wretched young brother of mine, half-choking with suppressed delight, drew his attention before everyone to the state of his lower extremities. What *was* it Dicky said? Oh, I know: 'I'll have your india-rubber beetle crushers, Slug.' Wasn't it a shame?" and Vi, with great difficulty, kept back a rebellious peal of laughter, and continued her story, regardless of Bentley having apparently fallen asleep; still

having to maintain an occasional struggle with a more than usually aspiring burst of merriment. "Well! poor fellow! his first object was to remove the crushers, and, looking miserably red and uncomfortable, he turned his back upon Mrs. Ottorose Smith and commenced to off goloshes, turn down trowsers; more irrepressible titters from the bystanders showed their appreciation of this manœuvre before he had got more than one golosh off, and with a wild look around he seized that, thrust it into the white coat tails of his midshipman's uniform, and bolted through the door. I haven't seen him since. The best of it is that he does not know Mrs. Ottorose Smith at all; but, seeing her stationed, bland and smiling, directly opposite the entrance, he had imagined her to be the lady patroness of the evening, and hastened to make his bow. She told me, as soon as I felt able to control my feel-

ings sufficiently to trust myself near her, that some young gentleman who seemed to know her, but whose face she had entirely forgotten, had been most attentive in paying his respects to her; *but*, she added, he had left her somewhat abruptly, and would I try and find out who it was, as he might be offended at her failing to recognise him. Just fancy! *Somewhat abruptly*; wasn't it good?" and Vi enjoyed one more good laugh at the thought of poor Barnaby's sudden departure.

"Glorious! perfectly *glorious!*!" said Bentley, with considerably more enthusiasm than the occasion seemed to Vi to demand. "She's excessively good, dear good fellow!" and he looked sentimentally at Miss Ormby who, quite at a loss to understand him, said that "she supposed so."

The polka was over, and Bentley wandered off with Vi on his arm. *He* anxious to escape as far as possible from

the other “paired off” ones; *she*, beginning at last to see that it would be better to get her partner to sit down quietly until the next dance commenced, and she could escape him.

“What heaps of people! almost impossible to get clear of them, isn’t it, Miss Ormby?” slowly demanded Bentley, after they had completed the round of the room for the third time.

“I think it is scarcely necessary to try,” said Vi, composedly. “I should like to sit down for a few minutes, please. It is nice and cool here. Will this do?” she asked, laughingly, as they sat down. Bentley did not appear inclined to be communicative, so she continued—

“Did you hear Miss Dutton’s rhyme about the services?”

Bentley muttered a negative, and added something about only caring to listen to what *one* girl had to say; looking so strangely at Vi, as he spoke, that she

determined not to sit out longer than she was obliged. A girl cannot run away shrieking in a ball-room.

“Well,” said she, “it will be a very pretty verse for you to remember, and it is certainly complimentary to you as a young sailor. This is it:

Old *sailors* are old rough and tough *Grizzly Bears*,
Old *soldiers* are darling old *ducks* ;
Young *sailors* are charming delightful young *dears*,
Young *soldiers* ; haw !—you know ! young *bucks*.

Is it not good? and so true I think !”

What Bentley thought of the verse is unknown; what he thought of Vi, as far as he was capable of thinking in his now stupid state, was soon evident.

It was enough for him that she laughed, talked slang occasionally, and evinced no “goody! goody!” tendencies. She must be *fast*, thought the fool, and not easily offended. Girlish light-heartedness and real simplicity were unknown qualities in his estimate of the sex; and so he called her *fast*.

The fair reader will remember that I write of several years ago; at the present time I know no girl that I would dare accuse of simplicity.

Bentley's thoughts were quickly followed by action, but we will let Vi tell us what happened, in her own way, and at her own time.

It was a great surprise to Dicky, a short time afterwards, to hear her pleading fatigue as an excuse for not dancing with *Dare*, and then to see her beckon to him to sit beside her.

“Now, what *is* the matter?” he asked, stopping by her chair. “Cecil made me lose quite half a dance with Bella, and now you want to do me out of one with Miss King, and I know she——”

“Why, you don't mean to say that you really mean to dance with that long lamp post?” interrupted Vi, with a burst of laughter, quite forgetting for the moment her real object in detaining Dicky.

“Don’t be feeble, Vi; of course I don’t mean the long one; it’s her cousin Amy.”

“Her cousin Amy, is it? Can’t say I admire your taste, Master Dicky.”

“Oh, bother my taste; she’s not as tall as her cousin, or as short as you, or as plump as Bella; that’s all I know about it. But what *is* it you want, Vi? because she is waiting.”

“Oh! I forget. I want to know if—” Vi hesitated, looking as if she would like to be able to put off her request altogether. “Could you—could you manage, Dicky, that we could leave after this dance?”

“What, leave now!” exclaimed the surprised Dicky. “Why the ‘Extras’ are all to come yet, and I heard you tell Daintree that you enjoyed them more than any.”

“Yes, yes; I know; so I do; but then, you know, it depends very much upon—upon one’s partner; doesn’t it, you dear old boy?”

“Ve-ry true; so it do,” sang Dicky, “but I don’t think you need be alarmed; you have cheek enough for anything, and if by some mistake, you have tied yourself to some objectionable fellow, tell him you are tired; he’s *sure* to believe that.” And Dicky grinned. “Or,” he continued, “or, happy thought, say you are engaged to me. I don’t mind giving you one dance. And now for Miss Amy King.”

“Yes; but, Dicky,” said Vi! stopping him, and giving a rather nervous laugh, “supposing that one is afraid to refuse.”

“*Afraid!* Ha, ha! you afraid of any male alive, or yet to live! Come, draw it mild, Vi! I’m off. But, why, what is it Vi? Eh?” He came close to her chair as she coloured painfully. “There’s nothing wrong *really*, is there? You don’t mean that you are *really* afraid? Who is the beggar?” Dicky spoke indignantly, and Vi hastened to quiet him.

“Oh, hush ! hush ! never mind now ; come away, there is a good old boy. Have your dance with ‘cousin Amy,’ and then I will ask Mrs. Monkton to go with us. She is tired too.”

Dicky had his dance, and in a quarter of an hour Mrs. Monkton, Vi, and he were on their way to the villa ; the others having determined to stop a little longer.

Vi’s chaperone thought that the excitement of the “coming out” ball had been a little too much for her young charge, and she was not sorry to leave the “Rooms” on her own account. Cecil had looked as if he would like to go with them, but a remark of Dicky’s—that he hoped to have just time for a yarn with Vi before she went to bed—made him decide on remaining with the rest. Mrs. Monkton went up stairs immediately they reached the house, advising Vi not to stay up much longer, and

the twins sat down to have their yarn. As soon as they were alone, Vi went over to Dicky and kissed him. "We are awfully fond of each other, you dear old fellow! I don't believe any brother and sister could be more chummy than we are."

"Not *half* such chums," asserted Dicky, putting his arm around her. "Precious few fellows have such rattling jolly sisters," he added. Vi stood by him thoughtfully for a minute, then smoothing back his hair caressingly, said, "I suppose you are dying to know why I have dragged you home so early. I'll tell you. It was simply one of my wild freaks. And now," she continued, turning away quickly at Dicky's incredulous look, "I will make you one of my most exquisite cigarettes; as only Vi *can* make them; and I promise not to go to bed until you have smoked it." She quickly rolled one, and took a puff or two before handing it to the Nipper

“There; now you will do!” she said. “Sit upright, and make the most of yourself. That’s right! You only have to grow a beard, and a few inches, and be able to stand a strong glass of grog and a pipe, to be *really* a man. That’s *all!*” And Vi stepped back a few paces and took stock of him, laughingly.

What a lot of good, honest love is often concealed in real, open chaff! *Chaff*, according to Johnson, means “a *worthless* thing;” but, when we turn it into slang, and make a verb of it, many of us have found it *useful* enough. Who has not discovered that *chaffing* often leads to loving? There’s a *worthy* result to be obtained by slang!

But Dicky had no idea of being put off thus. He puffed vigorously at his cigarette, and then quietly remarked, “It’s no good trying to escape, Vi! Out with it. Wild freak or stern reality, I mean to know all about it, as per usual.”

“And I suppose I must tell you, as per usual,” said she, nestling close to him. “If you had not been such a good boy, I would not say a single word. It was all through that nasty brute—yes, I mean it, *Brute* Bentley. How I hate him! What do you think he had the audacity to do?” she asked, indignantly, almost crying with vexation. “He actually kissed me! *me!* knowing how I hate him, and I’m *convinced* that those Roper girls saw him and *enjoyed* it!”

“He *is* a brute!” said Dicky, emphatically. “But you could easily have refused to dance with him again. I don’t see why you should have been *afraid*.” Again Vi coloured painfully, and hid her face on her brother’s shoulder before replying. “Oh, Dicky,” she said, “it was very stupid of me to be such a coward, but he looked at me so strangely that I couldn’t help it then. Besides, Dicky, it—it was not an ordinary kiss—perhaps

I shouldn't have minded that, you know!" she said, with a little laugh—"but, he did not kiss my face—he leant over me ever so roughly, and kissed me on the neck—twice!"

"The deuce, he did!" muttered Dicky.

"But I was a *muff* to be frightened," said Vi, springing up; "and I repeat that he's a *nasty brute*, and I *hate him*."

"I shall let him know what a cad I think him," said Dicky. "But you and I are not likely to have much more to do with him, little woman."

"I most fervently trust not, dear; he's not half good enough for us, and we have had too much of him already."

"And of his kisses too, eh, Vi? confound him! It is consoling to know that he can't last long. He's sure to be kicked out of the service, sooner or later."

"I'd kick him myself, with pleasure," said Vi, viciously.

"Always provided that the latest fashion.

would allow of it," laughed Dicky. "Don't go yet; there's no hurry," he continued, as Vi made preparations for moving; "I want you to tell me what the uncle said about our poor governor, when you managed to get him on the subject the other day."

"Of course you do; I had forgotten," said Vi, reseating herself. "I'm sorry to say that there's not much to tell. You know how seldom we can get him to mention his lost brother at all. The dear mater died when we were so young that it seems quite natural to suppose that we never had one at all; but, the father! I can just remember *him*, and that dreadful shipwreck, when he and Mary were drowned."

"What did the uncle say about him?"

"He could only answer a few of my questions. Our father must have been his favourite brother; but I think there was something wrong between them at

the last ; something that happened almost on the very day of the wreck, as far as I can gather from pumping the uncle ; poor old dear ! Mary appears to have received nearly all our father's love, after the poor mater died. Can you remember Mary at all, Dicky ? ”

“ No, I think. How much older was she ? ”

“ More than a year. Poor Mary ! How jolly it would be to have a sister ! How far back can you remember me ? ”

“ Remember you, Vi ! Why, I almost believe that *you* were *me* at one time, so much were we together ! Remember you ! Why when I try to think what the governor was like and what *I* used to have to do with him, I can only remember a tall man with a beard ; but sitting and laughing on his shoulder—is Vi. If I try to picture to myself the mater—pretty and jolly, as the uncle says she was—and to wonder whether she cared much

for *me*, I can only manage to conjure up an image, which I suppose to be her ; but, lying in her lap, pinching her cheeks and pulling her hair—is Vi. I remember our little wooden crib—Vi is in it. The old perambulator even, I sometimes think I can recognise—Vi is sitting in it ! Broken dolls !—Vi is playing with them. Was I a crowing baby, or a cry baby !—It is Vi who crows, or Vi who crys. There, young woman, does that satisfy you ? I really cannot remember when we started our separate existence—life on our own account ; for, whenever I look back, your wretched little carcass blocks the way, and I am out of it.”

“ Dear old boy,” said Vi ; “ who would imagine you to be so retiring ? And that reminds me, I must retire. The uncle is sure to ask in the morning at what time I went to bed. The old darling ! What *would* have become of us if he had been drowned as well as our father ? Why,

there are the others I do believe. Yes, it is, really," she added, as the carriage stopped at the door. "I shall run away. Good-night, old fellow. I want to escape tiresome questions," and she bolted upstairs just before Colonel and Mrs. Otto rose Smith, Monkton, and Daintree entered. The Miss Duttons had been given a lift home by some of their numerous friends.

"Here we are, Mr. Dicky, dead beat," said Mrs. O. S. throwing herself back into a comfortable arm-chair. "Was that dear child so very tired?"

"A little, I think. She's just gone to bed."

"Ah, over-excitement. I hope you made her take something before going up? Won't you sit down?" she continued, turning to Monkton. "I see they have left out some supper for us."

"We thank you," said Cecil, "we must be off. Early work to-morrow. 'Paying-off day,' you know."

“Just one B. and S. before you go, then,” suggested the colonel; “or a gin and tonic, eh?”

Quick! we have but a second,
Fill round the cup while you may;
For Time, the churl, hath beckon'd,
And we must away, away!

“Moore says that, so we'll e'en take his advice, have our liquors, and be off,” said Cecil.

“All putting up at the ‘Nut?’” asked the colonel.

“Yes; to-night we have our last sleep at the old ‘Nut’ for some time to come. Then for leave and half-pay.”

And, having swallowed their drinks, the three “Thunderbombs” squeezed into a hansom, and drove off to the Hard.



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